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of Traditions and Cultures 29

M. Ashraf Adeel

Epistemology of the Quran

Elements of a Virtue Approach to
Knowledge and Understanding

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Epistemology of the Quran

Elements of a Virtue Approach to Knowledge
and Understanding

 Springer

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Indeed, the worst of living creatures in the sight of Allah are the deaf and dumb who do not use reason. (Qur'ān 8:22)

*To my children,
Mohammad O. Adeel,
Nabeel Alam Adeel,
And
To my granddaughter,
Zara Alam Adeel,
May she grow to understand and practice
intellectual and moral virtue!*

Preface

It can hardly be overemphasized that the Qur'ān is the central text of Islamic civilization. As we cast a look at the Qur'ān, we realize that it is a text rich with knowledge-related terms and concepts. But it also goes without saying that the Qur'ān is not a philosophical text engaged in defining knowledge or knowledge-related terms and concepts. Rather, it is a text engaged with mankind's existential challenges, its moral and spiritual dilemmas, and its prospects in the world and the hereafter. Therefore, the Qur'ān uses the knowledge-related terms and concepts contextually to highlight our personal and social existential challenges and prospects. The purpose is to make human beings understand their position in history and in the world at an individual as well as a collective level and, thereby, awaken a sense of moral, intellectual, and spiritual urgency in man to do the right thing by man, by God, and by herself/himself. Hence, forms of ignorance, belief, knowledge, understanding, etc., for the Qur'ān, are wedded with the tree of life as a whole. They are not an isolated concern for the Qur'ān. In short, they are part of a civilizational worldview and its thoughtful practice.

Yet worldviews can be understood as wholes only if we understand the concepts and terms that constitute them and their fundamental principles. That applies to scientific worldviews as well as religious and/or cultural ones. Hence, it is imperative that we study the Qur'ānic epistemic concepts systematically for the sake of understanding their import and, through them, the import of the principles and the worldview they aim to constitute. The discussion of various terms and concepts in this book is to be viewed in this perspective. It is not meant to be a discussion that exhausts the meaning of these concepts but simply a way of alerting the prospective readers to the fact that the Qur'ānic worldview is constituted by the same epistemic concepts that we normally find in other worldviews.

This discussion is also meant as a way of initiating a systematic study of the Qur'ānic epistemic concepts. Unfortunately, in spite of the great significance of knowledge for the religion and civilization of Islam, there has been a dearth of systematic studies of the Qur'ānic epistemic concepts. These concepts have not been studied in a comprehensive fashion either on their own or in comparison with similar discussions of such concepts in other traditions. Medieval Muslim philosophers

developed their theories of knowledge, but those were generally not based on any systematic studies of Qur'ānic epistemic concepts.

As a result of this lack of focus on Qur'ānic epistemic concepts, or only the unsystematic uses of them, various methodologies historically employed by Muslim philosophers, jurists, exegetes, and scholars could not fully profit from the epistemological richness of the Qur'ān.

The key thing to keep in mind, though, is that the Qur'ānic concepts can be studied from a variety of epistemological perspectives and such studies should be an ongoing process. This brief study is a rudimentary beginning of such a process for understanding the Qur'ānic epistemic concepts from a contemporary point of view. It develops epistemic hints about the Qur'ānic epistemic concepts and connects them with some discussions in contemporary virtue epistemology.

Wilmington, DE, USA
June 23, 2018

M. Ashraf Adeel

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I also gratefully acknowledge the use I have made of the translations of the Qur'ān verses given at The Qur'ānic Arabic Corpus at <http://corpus.Qur'ān.com>.

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M. Ashraf Adeel

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Chapter 1

Introductory: An Overview



There are numerous verses in the Qur'ān that talk about knowledge and related concepts such as ignorance, understanding, wisdom, and even *taqwā*.¹ Many of these verses seem to imply or presuppose some kind of an epistemic responsibility as well as virtue on the part of an epistemic agent for knowing or understanding things properly. The question, therefore, is how best to interpret the concepts of such epistemic responsibility and virtue. Looking at the contemporary scene of analytic epistemology, it seems obvious that virtue epistemology is the approach directly concerned with such a concept of epistemic responsibility and the related concept of intellectual virtue. It is a relatively new field that has emerged in response to the intractability of certain issues in traditional analytic epistemology. Traditional epistemology is focused on knowledge, specifically propositional knowledge, and its definition. As opposed to that, virtue epistemology is focused on the epistemic agent and her intellectual character. Its concern is basically to inquire into the characteristics or virtues an epistemic agent needs to possess in order to attain her epistemic goals, like knowledge and understanding, etc. This shift from traditional to virtue epistemology has caused a big revival of interest in intellectual or epistemic virtues.

This book examines the Qur'ānic verses about knowledge and other related concepts in the perspective of this revival of interest in intellectual virtues. The verses involving the central Qur'ānic terms like *Jahl* (ignorance), *'il'm* (knowledge), *Taqwā* (righteousness), *dhū lūbb* (one with understanding), and *Hik'ma* (wisdom), etc., are examined for their presuppositions about or implications for the intellectual character of an epistemic agent. In the process we have looked at such concepts as ignorance, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom as well as the faculties through which these epistemic goals are attained. Through an analysis of the concept of blameworthy ignorance in the Qur'ān we have uncovered a set of intellectual virtues

¹ As discussed in detail in Chap. 4 below, *taqwā* is interpreted in this book as moral and intellectual conscientiousness in all spheres of life.

that seem to involve epistemic conscientiousness as central to them. An analysis of the verses pertaining to perceptual, rational, and revelatory knowledge also goes to show that the idea of epistemic responsibility is crucial for the Qur'ān for attainment of these types of knowledge. It is noted that revelatory knowledge is primarily testimonial knowledge for the Qur'ān and must be treated as God-given through properly functioning belief-forming faculties, but it also involves certain epistemic responsibilities for the Prophet. Similarly passive perceptual knowledge also seems to result primarily through properly functioning faculties. However, some degree of attention on the part of the epistemic agent is involved even in such passive knowledge and, hence, she accrues some epistemic responsibility in the matter. It is suggested, therefore, that responsibility of the epistemic agent (responsibilism) and reliability of her properly functioning cognitive faculties (reliabilism) should not be treated as mutually exclusive when it comes to understanding knowledge.

Further analytical focus on the Qur'ānic concept of *taqwā* has shown that *taqwā* is not just a moral concept but rather covers the epistemic side of human beings as well. As it turns out *taqwā* is a stable disposition, built on the foundation of a natural ability of the human self to distinguish right from wrong, which produces right action in the moral sphere and true belief in the epistemic sphere. It is moral and epistemic conscience that gets inculcated on the foundation of a natural ability. It then helps us form conscientious beliefs about things in all walks of life and perform conscientious action in all practical situations. (At least that is its aim.) In a nutshell, it is the source of all specific intellectual and moral virtues.

Through responsible and virtuous exercise of our faculties of knowledge like perception, reason (inductive and deductive), introspection, and memory etc., we aim to form not only true beliefs about things but also to attain the state of knowledge. Epistemic conscientiousness in forming beliefs can lead us to knowledge. Knowledge, therefore, is a by-product of the exercise of intellectual or epistemic virtues. The Qur'ān clearly relates it with such virtues as well as epistemic conscience or *taqwā*.

While knowledge is propositional in character,² an epistemic state of understanding appears to be generally holistic for the Qur'ān and involves a grasp of explanatory relations – presuppositions, interpretations, dependencies between different items, and implications, etc. Understanding may involve propositional knowledge as well. However, wisdom appears to be the use of understanding for sharpening *taqwā* so as to make the best possible use of one's understanding of a sphere of life for living well or living righteously. In wisdom one uses her understanding to reflect upon her own (reflective) understanding of a sphere of life or a subject matter to decide how best to use it for living well to achieve comprehensive success here or in the hereafter.

As far as the value of different epistemic states goes, knowledge is more valuable for the Qur'ān than true belief, while holistic understanding, being harder to achieve,

² Here is an example of propositional knowledge: "Beel knows that force is equal to the product of mass and acceleration." The proposition "force is equal to the product of mass and acceleration" is the object of Beel's mental state of knowledge.

is *finally* valuable. Wisdom seems to have still higher value because it results from reflection of understanding on itself to streamline itself for living well.

It needs to be emphasized that not only knowledge results from an exercise of intellectual virtue, but understanding and wisdom also come through the same exercise. However, the state of wisdom combines within itself intellectual and moral virtue. It strengthens our conscience or *taqwā*.

Overall, therefore, the Qur'ānic use of terms like *Jahl* (ignorance), *'il'm* (knowledge), *Taqwā* (righteousness), *dhū lūbb* (one with understanding), and *Hik'ma* (wisdom), etc., in different contexts goes to support a virtue approach to knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. The goal of the Qur'ān, of course, is not purely intellectual but transformative. It aims at so changing our lives that we end up living well. In the Qur'ānic view, living well is the same thing as living wisely which, in turn, is the same thing as living a life that leads to *falāḥ* or comprehensive success.

Chapter 2

From Ignorance to Knowledge: Deriving Epistemic Virtues from the Qur'ānic Conception of Ignorance



2.1 Introduction

Where there are 854 verses in the Qur'an that use various etymological variants of *'ayn lām mīm* ('*i-l-m*'), the Arabic root for terms relating to knowledge, there are an additional 24 verses which employ variants of *jīm hā lām* (*j-h-l*), the root for terms related to ignorance.¹ The verses of the Qur'an mentioning knowledge and ignorance mean what they mean in various contexts because they have presuppositions about the nature of both knowledge and ignorance. A careful study of these verses to uncover their epistemic presuppositions can provide us with an understanding of what the Qur'an, as a linguistic document, takes knowledge and ignorance to be. In this chapter we aim at examining the presuppositions of the verses mentioning variants of *j-h-l*.

In carrying out an analysis to uncover the epistemic presuppositions of these verses, I'll be working in the broad context of contemporary virtue epistemology. The reason for this approach stems from the fact that the Qur'ānic ascriptions of ignorance seem to point to various epistemic vices in epistemic agents. This means, among other things, that ascriptions of knowledge should involve presence and exercise of epistemic virtues in epistemic agents. Hence, it appears to be a basic assumption of the Qur'an that knowledge can best be understood in terms of certain epistemic virtues, and, falling prey to remediable blameworthy ignorance² (ignorance for which the epistemic agent can be held responsible because she failed to

¹ Unless mentioned otherwise all translations of Qur'an verses discussed in this book are from the Quranic Arabic Corpus.

² For a discussion of different kinds of ignorance, including remediable blameworthy ignorance, as understood by Plato, see the first chapter of K.M. Vogt (2012). I use the term here in a more general sense to refer to any form of ignorance that results from the failure of an epistemic agent to take correct epistemic action in a given situation.

take correct epistemic action to remedy it) is normally symptomatic of failure to be a conscientious epistemic agent.

In Sect. 2.1 below I give a brief set of introductory remarks about the contemporary emergence of virtue epistemology and the directions in which it is evolving. This overview sets the stage for casting a careful look in Sect. 2.2 on all the verses of the Qur'ān that talk about remediable blameworthy ignorance in humans with the purpose of deriving from them what the Qur'ān takes to be central epistemic virtues. The analysis brings out various forms of *epistemic conscientiousness* as central to epistemic virtues underscored by the Qur'ān.

2.2 A Note on Contemporary Virtue Epistemology

Since the publication of Edmund Gettier's article "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" in 1963, contemporary epistemology, focused on the issue of defining knowledge, has struggled to find ways of addressing what has come to be known as the Gettier Problem. Prior to his article, the definition of knowledge as *justified true belief*, with its possible roots in Plato's discussion in the *Meno* that knowledge may be "tethered" true belief (see Nidditch 1983, 17), had become common grist for epistemological mills.³ This so-called tripartite definition is normally unpacked as follows:

I *know* that P if and only if the following three conditions obtain:

- (i) I believe that P,
- (ii) P is true,
- (iii) I am justified in believing that P.

Justification in this definition may be understood in terms of supporting reasons – reasons that make it right for me to have the belief.⁴ Also, justification for a belief may or may not be mentally accessible to the believing person or epistemic agent. Roughly, the first way, where justification of her belief is accessible to the epistemic agent, is called *internalism* and is a counterpart in epistemology of deontological approach in ethics. On the other hand, the second way, where justification of her belief is not mentally accessible to the epistemic agent, is called *externalism* and is the counterpart in epistemology of consequentialist approach in ethics.⁵

³An early formulation of this definition of knowledge can be found in Ayer (1957, 31–33).

⁴Epistemic justification is a hotly debated issue and philosophical positions on the subject range from various forms of foundationalism through coherentism and foundherentism (mixture of foundationalism and coherentism proposed by Susan Haack) to infinitism, contextualism and reliabilism etc. For a discussion of these positions, see Fumerton (2005).

⁵See Robert Lockie's (2008, 170) discussion of this relationship between internalism/externalism and deontology/ consequentialism distinctions.

Regardless of how we understand the issues surrounding justification, Gettier showed, through a couple of revealing counterexamples, that the tripartite definition fails and *we can have true belief with justification without having knowledge*.

In Gettier's first counterexample, Smith and Jones apply for a job. Smith believes, on the basis of strong evidence, in the conjunctive proposition that Jones will get the job and that Jones has ten coins in his pocket. Smith's evidence consists of actually counting the coins in Jones' pocket and an assurance from the company president that Jones will get the job. Smith then rightly infers from the conjunctive proposition that the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket.

However, unbeknownst to Smith, it is Smith himself who will get the job and it is Smith himself who has ten coins in his pocket.

Obviously Smith's belief that the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket is true and justified. However, Smith clearly does not have the knowledge that the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket. So justified true belief does not amount to knowledge in this case.

In Gettier's second counterexample, Smith believes, again on the basis of strong evidence, in the proposition that

(a) Jones owns a Ford.

Say, Jones has recently given a ride to Smith in a Ford and also Smith remembers Jones to have owned a Ford in the known past.

Now Smith has another friend, Brown, whose whereabouts he doesn't know at all. Smith realizes that (a) entails the following propositions that he constructs on the basis of (a):

(b) Either Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Boston;

(c) Either Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Barcelona;

(d) Either Jones owns a Ford or Brown is in Brest-Litovsk.

Smith is obviously justified in believing these three propositions. However, Gettier now asks us to imagine that two further conditions hold. Jones doesn't own a Ford, but is driving a rented car. Also, unbeknownst to Smith, Brown happens to be in Barcelona. So (c) is true.

In this scenario Smith believes (c), (c) is true, and Smith is justified in believing (c). However, it is far from being the case that Smith *knows* that (c).

These two Gettier cases are meant to show that the so-called tripartite definition fails to provide necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge. These cases are the forebears of a whole range of cases that epistemologists have gone on to construct in order to either clarify or address Gettier's challenge to the tripartite definition or develop and evaluate its proposed replacements. However, the search for necessary and sufficient conditions of knowledge has gone on to face ever more ingenious counterexamples. Epistemologists, therefore, have struggled with the consequences of questions raised by Gettier type and other parallel cases for more than six decades.⁶

⁶For an overview of developments in epistemology since the mid-1970s see Pryor (2001, 95–124).

A number of theories of knowledge have been developed in the process of trying to handle these questions and our understanding of the issues in the field has definitely improved. Speaking in very rough and general terms, one can say that three types of theories/approaches have emerged. The first group of theories aims at discovering what might be called a *straight solution* to the Gettier problem. In other words, advocates of these theories believe that the Gettier problem can be solved by appropriately strengthening the conditions of knowledge in the tripartite definition. This group includes contextualism, relevant alternatives theories, foundationalism, and what has come to be called “modest” foundationalism.⁷ The other group of theories is based on the premise that no straight solution to the Gettier problem is forthcoming and, hence, we should focus on the quality of the epistemic agent herself rather than properties of her beliefs. Various versions of virtue epistemology like reliabilist or faculty-based virtue theories and responsibilist or character-based theories fall in this group.

A third approach, led by Timothy Williamson (2002), under the banner “knowledge first,” takes knowledge to be essentially un-analyzable in terms other than epistemic concepts. However, here we are concerned only with the second group of theories, i.e., virtue epistemology.

As hinted, advocates of virtue epistemology despair of a straight solution to Gettier-like problems in getting a handle on the concepts of knowledge and justification, etc. Hence, they have shifted the focus to epistemic agents and the norms and values that such agents need to live up to. Instead of trying to understand justified belief and knowledge in terms of the properties of belief, they try to identify intellectual virtues of epistemic agents and then understand justified belief and knowledge through these virtues. They have changed the direction of analysis, so to speak.

Sosa is considered to be the father of contemporary virtue epistemology. In a seminal paper, “The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence and the Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge,” he critiques both foundationalism and coherentism and then proposes to solve the controversy between these two positions by enlisting intellectual virtues as a basis for attaining justified belief and knowledge (see Sosa 1980, 3–26). Foundationalism and coherentism, he argues, are both mired in fundamental difficulties. Coherentism takes justification of our beliefs to be rooted in logical relations between them. If a belief coheres with other beliefs in my system of beliefs

Although this article gives a survey of developments since the mid-1980s, it briefly notes the mid-1970s developments in the introduction.

⁷Roughly contextualism is the view that truth of our knowledge-ascriptions is context-dependent. Depending on the context the same ascription of knowledge to a person might be true in one situation and false in another. For example, such a view can be found, among other writers, in the work of David Lewis (1996) and Keith DeRose (1992, 1999). Relevant alternative theories, developed by Dretske and Goldman in the 1970s, argue that knowing *p* does not require one to have evidence to rule out irrelevant alternatives to *p*. Foundationalism contends that justification for our beliefs ultimately rests upon certain other beliefs, called “basic beliefs,” that are themselves immediately justified. Traditionally foundationalism asked for these foundational beliefs to be infallible or indubitable. More modest contemporary approaches allow for fallible or revisable perceptual beliefs as basic in this sense. For modest foundationalist views see Pryor (2001).

then it is justified. Such a position, Sosa argues, cannot properly account for beliefs that are at the periphery of our system of beliefs. Take an ordinary perceptual belief that I am standing in front of a tree. This belief and its opposite can be made to cohere with belief systems that are not drastically different from each other. With some minor adjustments in the belief systems two opposing perceptual beliefs can be accommodated. Yet they cannot both be true or justified because the epistemic agent's sensory experience remains the same.

On the other hand, foundationalism claims that there is a pyramid-like structure to human knowledge and that some beliefs make for the foundations of this structure. These are beliefs based on sensory experience, i.e., perceptual beliefs. But now Sosa asks, if a sensory experience justifies a relevant perceptual belief, what is the nature of the principle that relates the sensory experience to the relevant belief? Is it some general principle or is it specific to the sense involved in the sensory experience, for example, the sense of sight in the case of the belief that I am standing in front of a tree? If it is a sense-specific principle of relation between the sensory experience and the belief that it justifies, then we need similar principles for different senses. Similarly we'll need different principles for beings with different sense-faculties than our own. In this case the foundationalist ends up with a multitude of principles in order to be able to account for different perceptual beliefs.

The other alternative is that it is a general principle from which the specific instances that relate sensory experiences with perceptual beliefs are derived. In this case the general principle provides the unifying ground to our justifications of perceptual beliefs.

But how are we to understand such a general principle? Sosa proposed that we could understand it in terms of intellectual virtues. If virtues in general were excellences of character, then intellectual virtues would be excellences of one's epistemic character and help us form beliefs on the basis of sensory or other type of inputs. Sosa takes virtues to be stable dispositions to act for achieving some good. These include our natural faculties that he takes as abilities or competences (Sosa 1991, 274). A virtue then is an innate or acquired ability. It is an ability that can reliably help us achieve a certain good. Intellectual or epistemic virtues are such cognitive dispositions or abilities or competences that can help us achieve epistemic goods like truth, etc. Sosa takes vision, hearing, introspection, memory, deduction, and induction to be the basic intellectual virtues. We can understand justification for perceptual beliefs, for example, in terms of our relevant intellectual virtues. If a belief is grounded in a reliable cognitive disposition or virtue or competence, then it is justified. Perceptual knowledge then would be justified true belief grounded in relevant intellectual virtues. In general justification and knowledge become a matter of exercise of intellectual virtues. Specific instances of justification relation between, say, a sensory experience and a belief are instances of the general idea that human beings possess reliable dispositions or virtues that help them form beliefs about the world based on sensory inputs. This way Sosa shows intellectual virtues to be providing the unifying ground for all our epistemic output.

According to Sosa virtue epistemology can also effectively explain the attraction of coherentism. We take coherence between our beliefs to have justificatory

significance because such coherence is an expression of intellectual virtue or excellence. Beliefs can be justified by intellectual virtues or stable dispositions related not only to perceptual faculty but also rational faculty. Foundationalism and coherentism, in this way, both become part of a unifying account of human output in the area of epistemic good. They need not exclude each other.

Sosa's analysis emphasizes reliability of epistemic dispositions or virtues as a basis for understanding justified belief and knowledge. Hence, his and similar views are characterized as *reliabilist* virtue epistemology. As Heather Battaly (2012, 10–12) notes, there are five key features to Sosa's analysis of intellectual virtues. These pertain to their reliability, natural or acquired status, need for an acquired virtuous motivation to act on them, identity with or distinctness from skills, and value.

For Sosa the virtues of vision, hearing, introspection, memory, deduction, and induction are reliable in the sense that under normal conditions they produce a preponderance of true rather than false beliefs. Their reliability is indexed to conditions under which they function/are exercised, and to "fields of propositions" that are about the basic characteristics of the object under view/consideration (Sosa 1991, 139).

Sosa takes some intellectual virtues to be natural while others might be acquired. Virtues like vision or hearing, for example, are obviously natural. But we also acquire intellectual virtues through learning. For example, the ability to interpret certain medical images is an acquired virtue. Because of this, unlike virtue responsibilists, Sosa does not think that we need an acquired virtuous motivation to care for truth in order to exercise our intellectual virtues. We need not have such motivation to exercise the virtue or competence of memory, for example. Sosa also does not think that virtues require intentional acts for their exercise. Virtues of vision and memory, for example, do not require any intentional act on the part of the epistemic agent to yield true beliefs.

In his more recent work Sosa has emphasized that intellectual virtues are similar to skills. This helps him point to "intentional" performances or exercises of intellectual virtues in his analysis of knowledge and true belief and, thereby, address the problem of additional value that knowledge possesses as compared to mere true belief. His position on the value of intellectual virtues has evolved similarly. Initially he held them to be valuable *instrumentally* insofar as they are reliable means for acquiring truth, which is *intrinsically* valuable. But he now thinks that virtues are intrinsically valuable because they play a constitutive role in producing true belief.

Subsequent to his seminal analysis, Sosa's detractors have criticized him either for not going far enough or for defending a traditional approach to epistemology. Those in the first camp agreed that virtue epistemology is the correct approach but have argued that *responsibility* is the fundamental epistemic notion when it comes to intellectual virtues. Lorraine Code, James Montmarquet, and Linda Zagzebsky are among the leading figures in this camp, sometimes referred to as *responsibilist* virtue epistemology. Their views differ from each other in various ways but all of them take epistemic *responsibility* as the key concept in virtue epistemology.

Code, for example, argues that Sosa's shift from the properties of belief to the intellectual virtues of the knower is a welcome one, as it focuses on the cognitive activities of persons who are part of a community of enquirers. However, such a shift

also makes epistemic *responsibility* the central concept in our effort to understand justification and knowledge. Sosa's reliabilism, Code argues, fails to take the active nature of the epistemic agent into account. "In my view," she says, "a knower/believer has an important degree of choice with regard to modes of cognitive structuring, and is accountable for these choices: whereas a "reliable" knower could simply be an accurate, and relatively passive, recorder of experience" (Code 1987, 51). So the epistemic agent is not a passive recipient of input when it comes to cognitive activities. She makes active choices and is responsible for them to herself and to the community of enquirers. Therefore, Code concludes that the "primary" epistemic virtue is *responsibility* and all other virtues need to be understood through it (54–57).

However, Code also argues that the sort of examples and counterexamples through which we have been trying to understand epistemic concepts like justification, true belief, or knowledge fail to do justice to epistemic activities as social practices and community efforts. Such examples are too individualistic and "thin," so to speak. She emphasizes that our cognitive efforts are interdependent and take place in communal contexts (Ch. 9 in particular). Knowledge-acquisition as well as practice of intellectual virtue involves epistemic community because of the social nature of human cognitive agency. Human cognitive activity is properly understood only as part of the social process of enquiry and whole stories or narratives of the life of the cognitive agents. In this regard she follows Alasdair MacIntyre's approach in virtue ethics (27).

As noted above, Sosa thinks of intellectual virtues as human cognitive faculties or abilities relevant for certain areas of cognition. For Code, virtues relevant to different cognitive faculties are better attributed to epistemic agents as persons rather than the faculties that such agents possess (57). In a similar vein James Montmarquet (1993, 20) develops the idea of intellectual virtues along the lines of Aristotle's moral virtues and characterizes them as personality traits. These are traits that an epistemic agent desiring truth would want to possess. According to Montmarquet, Sosa's view of intellectual virtues as reliable or *truth-conducive* faculties or abilities is mistaken because it fails to underscore the centrality of the epistemic agent's desire for truth in cognitive activities. It is the *desirability* of certain traits for attainment of truth that makes those traits into intellectual virtues for the concerned epistemic agent. The agent, therefore, acquires these traits. Such traits need not always be reliable means for the attainment of truth, given the possibility of a demon-controlled world where these virtues can be systematically dodged.

Also, it is the desire for truth that makes an agent *responsible* for her epistemic choices and if one has the proper intellectual virtues, like impartiality and carefulness for example, one can make *intellectually conscientiousness* choices. Hence, according to Montmarquet, intellectual virtues must be understood as personality traits and the "fundamental" intellectual virtue is intellectual conscientiousness. This virtue, it appears, is an equivalent in epistemology of moral conscience as understood by some moral philosophers such as Bishop Joseph Butler and Immanuel Kant. In addition to intellectual virtues based on desire for truth and avoidance of error, Montmarquet notes three categories of intellectual virtues that *regulate* the virtues based on the desire for truth: "the virtues of impartiality," "the virtues of

intellectual sobriety,” and “virtues of intellectual courage” (23). These regulating virtues he characterizes as “ways of being conscientious” and they are also acquired habits of action and motivation.

Zagzebsky also takes a responsibilist position but unifies intellectual and moral virtues and takes them both to be acquired traits of character. Moral traits or virtues are motivations for the good, while intellectual traits or virtues are motivations for knowledge and other forms of “cognitive contact with reality.” She defines knowledge as follows:

Knowledge is a state of cognitive contact with reality arising out acts of intellectual virtue. (1996, 270)

In a later work she formulates the same idea as follows:

Knowledge is belief in which the believer gets to the truth because she acts in an epistemically conscientious way. (2009, 127)

Epistemic conscientiousness, therefore, is central to Zagzebsky’s virtue epistemology as well.⁸ She defines virtue as follows:

A virtue ... [is] a deep and acquired excellence of a person, involving a characteristic motivation to produce a certain desired end and reliable success in bringing about that end. (1996, 137)

Given this understanding of virtue as a stable and acquired character trait, Zagzebsky makes the following remarks to explain the nature of intellectual virtues:

These are the virtues that have as a component an emotion disposition that arises out of or depends upon the basic emotion of love of truth, or epistemic conscientiousness. In addition to a specific emotion disposition that arises from love of truth, I propose that each virtue of epistemic conscientiousness is such that its possession reliably succeeds at bringing about true belief through belief-forming acts motivated by the emotion characteristic of the virtue. (2009, 81)

She mentions a number of individual or community-wide intellectual virtues and, disagreeing with Montmarquet’s claim that these virtues need not be reliable, emphasizes their reliability (1993, 185). At the individual level she argues for virtues of attentiveness, intellectual carefulness, thoroughness, courage, perseverance, firmness, humility, generosity, and open-mindedness. At the community level she argues for epistemic generosity, fairness, and tolerance. Her view about these virtues is that they are character traits that limit or enhance self-trust or trust in others. Zagzebsky says:

These traits that restrain or enhance self-trust would not be virtues unless the self is trustworthy. The traits that restrain or enhance trust in others would not be virtues unless others are trustworthy. Under the assumption that people are basically trustworthy, these traits aid an epistemic agent in obtaining true beliefs. An agent has conscientious self-trust when she has these qualities. (2009, 103)

⁸Other virtue epistemologists like Wayne Riggs (1998) and John Greco (2003) have given comparable definitions.

Zagzebsky distinguishes virtues from skills for a variety of reasons (for details see 1996, 106–16). Crucially the former require a motivation to act whereas the latter do not. In addition, skills are valuable only extrinsically while virtues have extrinsic as well as intrinsic value.

Recently Battaly and Baehr, in two separate articles, (see Greco and Turri 2012, pp. 3–32 and pp. 33–69) have articulated helpful taxonomies of virtue epistemologies. Battaly, who deals with both faculty-based or reliabilist epistemologies and character-based or responsibilist epistemologies, divides them into what she calls “virtue theories” and “virtue anti-theories.” Sosa and Zagzebsky are the leading figures in virtue theory approach. As Battaly puts it, “...advocates of virtue theory have argued that it can resolve some of the key debates in traditional analytic epistemology. With this end in mind, both Sosa and Zagzebsky have proposed solutions to the Gettier problem, and provided accounts of low-grade perceptual knowledge” (6).

Virtue anti-theorists, on the other hand, have argued that epistemology should be centered on analysis of intellectual virtues without aiming at establishing any essential connections between intellectual virtues and concepts of knowledge and justification. In this approach Battaly notes two separate trends – what she calls “virtue-eliminativism” and “virtue-expansionism.” According to the first trend, epistemology should focus on an analysis of intellectual virtues alone and should eliminate traditional concerns with knowledge and justification, etc. Virtue-expansionism, on the other hand, aims basically at analysis of intellectual virtues but allows for accommodating traditional concerns in the epistemological project (7).

According to Battaly, Jonathan Kvanvig represents virtue-eliminativism while Christopher Hookway, Miranda Fricker, Robert C. Robert, and Jay Wood are all virtue-expansionists.

In contradistinction to Battaly, the taxonomy presented by Baehr (Greco and Turri 2012, pp. 33–69) is primarily focused on character-based or responsibilist virtue epistemology. He distinguishes between conservative and autonomous approaches of responsibilist epistemology and divides each of them into two subtypes. The conservative approach, according to Baehr, takes the concept of intellectual virtue to be fundamental for addressing the concerns of traditional epistemology. Such an approach looks at intellectual virtues as central to solving traditional problems of knowledge and justification. Zagzebsky is the prime example of this approach. The conservative approach is either strong or weak depending on whether or not one sees a strong connection between the solution of traditional epistemological problems and intellectual virtues. Zagzebsky is a strong conservative in this sense while above-mentioned people like Hookway, Fricker, Robert, and Wood are weak conservatives.

The autonomous approach “regards reflection of the intellectual virtues as occupying an intellectual niche outside of traditional epistemology...”. Radicals among them say that focus on intellectual virtues should “replace” the traditional concerns of epistemology, whereas the moderates look at an autonomous virtue-based approach as complementing traditional epistemology rather than replacing it. Kvanvig’s epistemology is an example of a radical autonomous approach, whereas Code falls in the moderate camp.

Battaly and Baehr's taxonomies show that the debate about intellectual virtues touches issues at the very foundation of our conception of epistemology. In our analysis of Qur'ānic epistemological concepts, we will remain focused on intellectual virtue(s) with an effort to derive implications for understanding the nature of knowledge. It is our contention that intellectual virtues are primary to human cognitive activity and that traditional concerns of epistemology will fall into place in due course once we have a better understanding of what role intellectual virtues play in our personal or communal epistemic perspectives.

2.3 Deriving Epistemic Virtues from the Qur'ānic Conception of Ignorance

The Arabic words for ignorance (*Jāhiliyyat*), belief (*ẓann*), and knowledge (*'il'm*) are derived from the roots *jīm hā lām* (*j-h-l*) in the first case and *zā nūn nūn* (*z-n-n*) and *'ayn lām mīm* in the second and third. According to Lane's Arabic Lexicon, *ẓann* can mean thought, opinion, supposition, or conjecture (Lane 1863). It can, therefore, mean "belief" insofar as an opinion can be taken as an expression of a belief.⁹ These terms, therefore, roughly correspond to Plato's tripartite division of cognitive powers in Book 5 (476 E 4) of the *Republic*, i.e., *agnosia* or ignorance, *doxa* or opinion/belief, and *episteme* or knowledge.

Let us look at the way the Qur'ān uses variants of the root *j-h-l* so as to get an understanding of the concept of ignorance in the Qur'ān. This root occurs 24 times in the Qur'ān in six forms. The following attitudes or ways of mind are characterized as ignorance in these usages: refusal to accept (even overwhelming) evidence in favor of an idea (6:111), adopting others' customs thoughtlessly (7:138), inability/refusal to see the worth of people because of their (lowly) station (11:29), satisfying desires unnaturally (27:55), lack of openness to evidence combined with arrogance (46:23), thinking other than the truth about God (3:154), false vanity (of tribalism) (5:50), showy behavior (33:33), zealotry (for wrong causes) (48:26), accepting reports of unrighteousness without investigation (49:6), taking unprecedented moral risk beyond one's capacities (at the time of creation) (33:72), lying on behalf of God (2:67), taking the poor to be self-sufficient, i.e., social insensitivity (2:273), misplaced impatience for results (6:35), asking for a favor for your family (from God) without knowing its real meaning (11:46), falling prey to temptation (12:33), harming your brother out of jealousy (12:89), aggressive attitude and arrogance towards the humble (25:63), vain talk or ill speak (28:55), and attributing partners to God (39:64).

There are four other verses where the Qur'ān uses variants of the root *j-h-l*. One exhorts us to keep away from the company of the ignorant (7:199). The other three speak about the acceptability of repentance for actions done in ignorance (4:17,

⁹For example, *ẓannā* is translated as "they believe" in the Quranic Dictionary at [http://corpus.quran.com/wordbyword.jsp?chapter=2&verse=230#\(2:230:20\)](http://corpus.quran.com/wordbyword.jsp?chapter=2&verse=230#(2:230:20)).

6:54, 16:119). These four verses seem to have only indirect relevance to the concept of ignorance in the Qur'ān, and, hence, we focus on the other twenty mentioned above.

There are two levels at which these twenty verses can be examined to uncover a concept of ignorance from them: the level of the content and the level of ontology. At the level of content we can examine the verses for various characteristics because of which or through which an epistemic agent exhibits ignorance. At the level of ontology we can examine the verses to uncover whether the said instance of ignorance is related to an entity or a concept.¹⁰ Content analysis will point us to epistemic vices that produce ignorance while a look at ontology will give us an insight into the nature of ignorance related to entities. In the end both are related because we understand entities through concepts.

The first verse noted in the above list is 6:11:

Had We sent the angels to them, made the dead speak to them, and resurrected all things before their very eyes, they still would not believe unless God willed it to be so. But, in fact, most of them are ignorant.¹¹

Its basic point is that ignorant ones won't believe in God even in the face of overwhelming evidence. From the perspective of our concerns here, it amounts to saying that an ignorant person won't recognize an entity even when overwhelming evidence is brought to bear in the matter. So ignorance here seems to come down to a kind of *insensitivity to evidence* for the existence of an entity. Evidence is there, looking you in the face, but you cannot see where it leads. Such a situation does not seem to be a result of inattention. You are attentive to the evidence but your mind is colored or conditioned in such a way that you fail to take the import of the evidence in and are unable to reach the right ontological conclusion. We can cite the attitude adopted by the deniers of global warming in our times as an example of a similar situation. The scientific evidence for global warming is overwhelming. The deniers are not dazed either; in fact they are aware of the evidence. Still their minds are so colored (by the opposite outlook on things or by vested interest or by both) that they refuse to accept what follows from the evidence.

In this type of a situation the epistemic agent's mind seems to be working with certain misconceptions about the evidence or where the evidence seems to lead. As a result the agent refuses to recognize the phenomenon or entity in question. In a nutshell, this type of ignorance is produced by the grip of misconceptions on a mind. An epistemic agent with such a mind cannot see things aright. Her mind is desensitized to the true import of the evidence. In Plato's characterization of igno-

¹⁰ Here I am following Gottlob Frege's basic claim in ontology wherein there are only two kinds of entities, i.e., concepts and objects. In Frege's terminology objects are "saturated" entities while concepts are "unsaturated." In predicative statements, concepts join with objects to make a complete whole. In Frege's language, objects are said to fall under concepts. For example, in "snow is white" the object "snow" is claimed to fall under the concept "whiteness." The result in this case is a true statement. If we were to say "snow is hot," the result would be a false statement. For details of his position see Frege (1951, 168–80).

¹¹ This is Muhammad Sarwar's translation with slight emendation by me toward the end.

rance, the concerned agent's mind is focused on or is related to "what is not" (*Republic* 478 b-c) rather than what is.

Such an agent is obviously not being *epistemically conscientious* insofar as she is not alive to her epistemic responsibility of being *open* to evidence. She is in the grip of a specific epistemic vice. In other words, she fails to exercise the epistemic virtue of *openness* to evidence and is obviously blameworthy for this failure.

The second verse noted above is about thoughtless and uncritical adoption of a custom (7:138):

We helped the children of Israel to cross the sea. They came to a people who worshipped idols. The Israelites demanded Moses to make gods for them like those of the idol-worshippers. Moses told them, "You are an ignorant people."

Now the Prophet Moses had just freed the Israelites from centuries of slavery and servitude. As they come upon a people worshipping "idols," they want to imitate these people slavishly and uncritically, without regard to the teachings of their leader/Prophet. Moses describes this uncritical acceptance of another people's custom by the Israelites as a sign of ignorance. The question is why? It appears that after successfully bringing his people out of bondage Moses must have expected them to be alive and alert to his monotheistic teachings and rejection of idol worship that followed from these teachings. For the Israelites to ignore these teachings and thoughtlessly desire to imitate an idol-worshipping community must have been shocking for Moses. They appear to have completely missed the point of Moses' teaching. Moses was obviously not asking for *any* kind of worship. He wanted his people to worship one true God. If the Israelites failed to evaluate critically what they were asking of Moses, they were not living up to their responsibilities as rational beings. As epistemic agents they exhibited *insensitivity*, a product of their thoughtlessness, to the meaning of what they desired to do in terms of worship. From Moses' point of view, they were totally mistaken in their conception of worship. Their ignorance, therefore, turns out to be a kind of misconception about worship, based on a thoughtless adoption or embracing of a custom or idea behind it. Human reason has the *capacity to evaluate ideas* before adopting them. This capacity is an *epistemic virtue* and the Israelites failed to exercise it before declaring their willingness to worship an idol. That is what made them ignorant and blameworthy.

The next verse noted above is 11:29:

And O my people, I ask not of you for it any wealth. My reward is not but from Allah. And I am not one to drive away those who have believed. Indeed, they will meet their Lord, but I see that you are a people behaving ignorantly.

Actually this verse is part of a set describing Noah's efforts and pleadings to make the rich ones among his people see the truth of his teaching. The chiefs argued with Noah that they didn't see anything extraordinary about him or his followers. In fact his followers were "meanest among us, in judgment immature" (11:27). The above verse is Noah's response to the chiefs. Here the point of Noah's plea seems to be that his followers, because of their faith, have a religious, moral, and spiritual worth that is independent of their worldly possessions or station. Those who fail to see the worth of these people because of arrogance based on worldly riches and station are

“behaving ignorantly.” If a person’s worldly station and/or riches create in him arrogance that blocks his ability to see the genuine “worth” of ordinary human beings, then such a person suffers from blameworthy ignorance. Why is that the case?

It is obvious that such a person fails to develop the correct conception of those other human beings. He suffers from misconceptions about their worth. Therefore, he is *ignorant* about their worth. This misconception or ignorance is produced by arrogance that prevents one from being fair in one’s judgment of the “lowly” of the world. *It prevents one from exercising the virtue of epistemic fairness.*

The next verse relevant for our purposes, 46:23, also has similar implications when understood in the context of the story of the people of Prophet ‘Ad or *Hud*. They had also similarly refused to believe in their prophet’s teachings and, hence, are characterized as ignorant.

The verse, 3:154, is about a faction of people having other than true thought about God and this is described as “thought of ignorance.”

Then after distress, He sent down upon you security [in the form of] drowsiness, overcoming a faction of you, while another faction worried about themselves, thinking of Allah other than the truth – the thought of ignorance, saying, “Is there anything for us [to have done] in this matter?” Say, “Indeed, the matter belongs completely to Allah.” They conceal within themselves what they will not reveal to you. They say, “If there was anything we could have done in the matter, some of us would not have been killed right here.” Say, “Even if you had been inside your houses, those decreed to be killed would have come out to their death beds.” [It was] so that Allah might test what is in your breasts and purify what is in your hearts. And Allah is Knowing of that within the breasts.

This verse concerns the behavior of hypocrites during the battle of *Uhad* between the Muslims and their Meccan invaders. The basic epistemic idea in the verse concerns saying/believing things other than the truth about God. Such thoughts are described as thoughts of ignorance. By parity of reasoning the idea should apply to any entity. Thinking falsely about any entity would be thinking ignorantly. Therefore, thinking truly of an entity is necessary for having knowledge of that entity, according to this verse of the Qur’ān. This obviously matches with contemporary near-consensus among epistemologists that true belief is an essential component of knowledge.

Thinking a false thought about an entity is to apply a wrong predicate to it and hence, when someone is having thoughts of ignorance in this sense, s/he is applying wrong predicates to entities. In other words s/he is having misconceptions about those entities. However, in this particular case, we cannot point to a single epistemic virtue which, when not exercised by the epistemic agent properly, results in false thoughts. *Any epistemic lapse can produce false thoughts, where an epistemic lapse is understood to be a failure to exercise one or the other of the epistemic virtues.* A certain epistemic vigilance or conscientiousness, therefore, seems essential to avoid false thoughts. It is this *epistemic vigilance or conscientiousness* that the Qur’ān seems to require of the people to avoid having thoughts of ignorance.

The next verse to be considered is 5:50:

Then is it the judgment of [the time of] ignorance they desire? But who is better than Allah in judgment for a people who are certain [in faith].

The term *hukm-ul-jahiliyya* in this verse literally means judgment of ignorance. Abdullah Yousaf Ali, in his commentary on this verse, takes it to be talking about “the days of tribalism, feuds and selfish accentuations of differences in man” (Ali 2003, fn 763). This type of tribal, ethnic, and selfish mentality is based on “vain desires” (mentioned in the verse preceding this one, 5:49) or some kind of false vanity anyway. The preceding verse exhorts the Prophet to judge between these people on the basis of the (just principles of) scripture rather than their “vain desires.” That means that the term *hukm-ul-jahiliyya*, judgment of ignorance, applies to judgments based on vain desires or false vanity. The Qur’ān, therefore, takes replacement of just principles with vanities or vain desires in matters of judging between people as a form of ignorance. That means that when one fails to do what is just or right because of vanity, one exhibits ignorance. This is a failure on one’s part to exercise the virtue of due humility. Since the Qur’ān is talking about ignorance, the virtue of humility desired here must be epistemic in nature or both epistemic and moral. For our purposes here, it is the virtue of epistemic humility that is of interest. *Failure to exercise the virtue of epistemic humility produces (judgment of) ignorance.*

It is also important to note that when one insists upon judging between people based on tribal vanities or vain desires, one misconceives the situations between people. One applies wrong concepts to the situations. Therefore, what the Qur’ān calls judgment of ignorance in this verse turns out to be judgment based on misconceptions. The idea is similar to previous verses considered by us.

The next verse listed above is 33:33:

And abide in your houses and do not display yourselves as [was] the display of the former times of ignorance. And establish prayer and give *zakah* and obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah intends only to remove from you the impurity [of sin], O people of the [Prophet's] household, and to purify you with [extensive] purification.

This verse exhorts the members of the Prophet’s household to avoid displaying themselves like “the display of the times of ignorance.” Immodest show or display of femininity is termed a mark of the times of ignorance by the Qur’ān. Such behavior is, therefore, a mark of ignorance. Why would the Qur’ān characterize such display as ignorance? The reason seems to be that such a display amounts to taking oneself as an object of display, which demeans a human being. Therefore, self-demeaning showy behavior is a mark of ignorance for the Qur’ān. Why is that the case? The reason seems to be that in such behavior one fails to treat oneself in a balanced and fair manner. One fails to respect oneself in an appropriate way by overemphasizing certain aspects of one’s being at the expense of one’s personhood. *This means that one fails to accord oneself the required reasonable degree of self-respect and exercise the epistemic virtue of fairness in regard to oneself.*

Making a display of oneself in this way also implies that one misconceives oneself as a person. Misconception is an essential part of ignorance in this verse as well.

The next verse mentioned above is 48:26:

When those who disbelieved had put into their hearts chauvinism - the chauvinism of the time of ignorance. But Allah sent down His tranquility upon His Messenger and upon the

believers and imposed upon them the word of righteousness, and they were more deserving of it and worthy of it. And ever is Allah, of all things, Knowing.

This verse is part of the Qur'ānic description of the Treaty of *Hudaibiya* between the Meccans and Muslims just about a year before the Muslim conquest of Mecca. The verse brings out the difference in attitudes of the two sides during negotiations and the writing of the Treaty. On the one hand, Muslims were tranquil and righteous while, on the other, the pagan Meccans were chauvinistic in their care or love of their tribal/pagan loyalties. The term *hamiyyat-ul-jahiliyya*, translated as “the chauvinism of the time of ignorance” above, literally means “care or attachment of ignorance” (Lane 1863, 652). The basic idea here seems to be that if one ignores what is right or correct in his/her zeal to identify with attachments of ignorance, *one exhibits lack of proper care for what is right or correct*. The implied expectation of the Qur'ān seems to be that we should care for what is right and such *care* saves us from attachments of ignorance. *The Qur'ān seems to be underlining the epistemic virtue of caring for what is right or correct*. Absence of such care can place one under misconceptions about the matter in hand.

The next verse on our list above is 49:6:

O you who have believed, if there comes to you a disobedient one with information, investigate, lest you harm a people out of ignorance and become, over what you have done, regretful.

The Qur'ānic term *Fāsiq*, translated as “disobedient,” has both religious and moral connotations. It can also be translated as “wicked” or “evil-doer.” The Qur'ānic idea here seems to be that if a morally untrustworthy person offers news or information, it should be properly verified before acting upon. Otherwise harm to people may get done. Here the basic epistemic idea in play is that *the Qur'ān desires us to accept testimony of only (apparently) trustworthy people*. Doing otherwise lands us in ignorance. This is the Qur'ānic pre-requisite on testimonial knowledge. If there is reason to doubt a person's testimony, we must not take it at face value.

The next verse mentioned above is 33:72:

Indeed, we offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they declined to bear it and feared it; but man [undertook to] bear it. Indeed, he was unjust and ignorant.

This is one of the central verses of the Qur'ān insofar as descriptions of human station in the World is concerned. The Trust spoken of here is the Trust of free will (Ali, fns. 3778–9). Man is the only creature in the heavens and the earth that undertook to be free in his “eternal Covenant” with God. Everything else submits to the Will of God and follows the laws prescribed for it.

Insofar as humankind undertook to be free and bear the burden of this Trust (of freedom), it undertook to be in a state of grave risk (of individuals going wrong in their choices). In a way it was risk-taking beyond an individual human's limitations or powers. This seems to be the reason why the Qur'ān mildly scolds humans as “unjust and ignorant.”

From an epistemic point of view, it appears that ignorance is taken here to be a failure to realize one's limitations and taking on responsibilities larger than one's capacities. *In other words, knowledge requires the virtue of knowing the proper extent of one's capacities.* Absence of this type of self-knowledge can signify or cause ignorance. The obvious reason seems to be that one misconceives the extent of one's capacities.

The next verse listed above is 2:67, where Moses seeks refuge of God from being "among the ignorant" by telling lies on behalf of God. The epistemic import of this verse doesn't seem to be different than 3:154 discussed above. It amounts to saying other than truth about God. Hence, the same ideas are involved here.

The verse 2:273 is mentioned next on our list above:

[Charity is] for the poor who have been restricted for the cause of Allah, unable to move about in the land. An ignorant [person] would think them self-sufficient because of their restraint, but you will know them by their [characteristic] sign. They do not ask people persistently [or at all]. And whatever you spend of good – indeed, Allah is Knowing of it.

This verse is about one's social responsibility toward those who are needy because some good cause restricts them from moving about in the land to earn more resources. If one goes on appearances only, one can ignorantly take them to be free of want because of their restraint in asking. Avoiding such ignorance means that one shouldn't go just on appearances. One should investigate such cases properly to assess the needs of such self-respecting people.

The epistemic point in this verse seems to be that we need to examine appearances critically before we reach a decision in such cases. Now, as noted in our discussion of verse 7:138, *such critical analysis requires exercise of our capacity or virtue of rationality to evaluate ideas and situations.* We exhibit ignorance by laboring under misconceptions if we fail to exercise this virtue.

The next verse, 6:35, is about the Prophet's urgent desire that people come to accept revealed guidance. The Qur'ān notes that such impatient desire is misplaced and should be avoided because it can place one among the ignorant:

And if their evasion is difficult for you, then if you are able to seek a tunnel into the earth or a stairway into the sky to bring them a sign, [then do so]. But if Allah had willed, He would have united them upon guidance. So never be of the ignorant.

When people spurned the guidance it was hard on the Prophet's mind to see them do so. He wanted them to be guided and be on the path of righteousness and felt frustrated and upset. According to the Qur'ān, this impatience for results in matters of people's acceptance of religious guidance is misplaced. Had God so willed he would have united all on the path of righteousness. There is a divine plan to these matters under which people apparently remain diverse in their outlooks. The Prophet is ordered to avoid such misplaced desire and impatience for people's guidance, because it is a form of ignorance. *It makes one misconceive the way people are meant to be guided by God.* After they have been exposed to the divine message, some will accept it and others will not.

Hence, impatience for results without full knowledge of relevant facts, divine or otherwise, is a form of ignorance for the Qur'ān. It appears, therefore, that *patience*

to get all the relevant facts right or into account is an epistemic virtue for the Qur'ān and our failure to exercise this virtue lands us in ignorance.

The next verse 11:46 is part of Noah's story in the Qur'ān:

He said, "O Noah, indeed he is not of your family; indeed, he is [one whose] work was other than righteous, so ask Me not for that about which you have no knowledge. Indeed, I advise you, lest you be among the ignorant."

In the previous verse, 11:45, Noah calls upon His Lord at the time of the Flood and asks for his unrighteous son to be saved as per promise that his (Noah's) family will be saved. This verse is God's response to Noah's prayer.

It comes out clearly here that blood ties do not supersede righteousness or truth. Even when a prophet of Noah's stature momentarily overlooks this principle, he is counseled immediately to refrain from acting like an ignorant person. From an epistemic standpoint, therefore, if blood ties blur a person's vision and block her/his ability to stand by truth or righteousness, s/he is said to be in a state of ignorance. Again this makes a person labor under a misconception about understanding the reality of her/his relative's character. That is why it is ignorance.

We need to avoid prejudices based on blood ties and evaluate people on the merits and/or demerits of their character. *This requires the epistemic virtue of being open to and taking into account the relevant moral facts by avoiding prejudices. Failure to exercise this virtue because of prejudices lands us in ignorance.*

The next verse, 12:33, is part of the story of Prophet Joseph in the Qur'ān wherein the wife of a vizier of the Egyptian court, Aziz, makes an effort to tempt Joseph. In the verse Joseph prays:

He said, "My Lord, prison is more to my liking than that to which they invite me. And if You do not avert from me their plan, I might incline toward them and [thus] be of the ignorant."

Here Joseph equates falling into the temptation of illicit sex with ignorance. The reason appears to be that such sex is based in pure lust and blinds one's mind to the moral necessity of socially responsible behavior. *One needs to exercise the virtue of self-restraint in such situations. Otherwise one misconceives her/his sex needs and falls prey to ignorance. Self-restraint, therefore, is both a moral and an epistemic virtue.*

The next three verses on our list, 12:89, 25:63, and 28:55 are all related to *ignorance caused by failure to exercise the virtue of self-restraint* in relation to negative emotions like jealousy or in speech addressed to the humble and courteous, or foul speech. The epistemic import of these three verses is similar to 12:33 of the preceding paragraph.

The last verse on our list above is 39:64:

Say, [O Muhammad], Is it other than Allah that you order me to worship, O ignorant ones?"

This is a verse related to Qur'ānic monotheism. Holding partners to God is a form of misconceiving God's attributes for the Qur'ān and, hence, it is ignorance. So it is a kind of failure to exercise the virtue of openness to this revealed Qur'ānic truth. *It would appear, therefore, that the Qur'ān requires the exercise of the virtue of*

openness to the truth of revelation where required. Indirectly this verse also establishes revelation as a source of knowledge as far as the Qur'ān is concerned.

It has come out consistently from our analysis thus far that *ignorance*, for the Qur'ān, is *laboring under misconceptions about things and results from a failure of exercise of certain epistemic virtues*. The following epistemic virtues have been identified in the above analysis:

Epistemic responsibility of being open to evidence, rational responsibility to evaluate ideas before adopting them, epistemic fairness, avoidance of epistemic lapse or failure to exercise some relevant epistemic virtue or epistemic vigilance, epistemic humility, fairness in regard to oneself or reasonable self-respect, caring for what is right, responsibility of accepting only trustworthy testimony, knowing the proper extent of one's capacities, responsibility for a rational analysis of ideas, patience to get all the facts right, avoiding prejudice by being open to relevant facts, openness to the truth (of revelation).

It is clear that all these virtues are a form of *epistemic conscientiousness*. The key virtue for the Qur'ān seems to be epistemic conscientiousness. We no longer can remain epistemically conscientious in case we ignore overwhelming evidence for an idea or fail to rationally evaluate it before adopting it. The results are similar if we violate the requirements of epistemic fairness or fail to exercise some relevant epistemic virtue in a given situation. Allowing vanity to cloud our judgment and not having a balanced respect or trust of our capacities similarly violates epistemic conscientiousness. The same goes for the rest of the virtues in the list above.

However, this is not meant to be an exhaustive list of the epistemic virtues mentioned in the Qur'ān. These are the virtues presupposed by the verses that mention ignorance in various ways. Of course, there are many other epistemic virtues mentioned in the Qur'ān in different contexts.

On the basis of the above analysis, one may suggest that it appears from the analysis of the Qur'ānic conception of ignorance that with proper self-respect, i.e., trust of one's own capacities (perceptual, rational, and intuitive) one can conscientiously form beliefs by being open to all the relevant evidence or facts and such beliefs can turn out to be not only true but can attain the level of being knowledge. In this process of succeeding to attain knowledge, we have to be open to all relevant evidence, fair in our assessment of it, free of prejudice in the matter in hand, show proper humility, avoid epistemic lapses, and be critically alert. All these virtues (and others) must come into play in the contexts relevant to them because they together constitute epistemic conscientiousness, which seems necessary and sufficient for the Qur'ān for attainment of knowledge.

The key to avoidance of ignorance and attainment of knowledge for the Qur'ān, therefore, is the virtue of *epistemic conscientiousness*. It appears that the Qur'ān, in its verses analyzed above, presupposes the presence of an *epistemic conscience*, an ability parallel to and at a par with moral conscience, in human beings. Proper exercise of this epistemic conscience can result in attainment of knowledge and failure to do so can produce ignorance. Whether or not such a hypothesis about the presence of an epistemic conscience can be sustained through analysis of further epis-

temic texts of the Qur'ān and how far it can go in addressing philosophical issues pertaining to knowledge is to be determined in subsequent chapters.

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Chapter 3

The Qur'ānic Hints about Epistemic Responsibility: An Analysis of Etymological Variants of '*i-l-m*' in the Text



3.1 Introduction

As in the case of *j-h-l*, the Qur'ānic verses that employ etymological variants of the root '*i-l-m*', trilateral root for the Arabic word for knowledge, presumably presuppose or imply a certain set of hints about the nature of knowledge. One can glean some elements of or hints about a possible conception of knowledge by analyzing these verses in the light of contemporary epistemological approaches. These verses divide into a number of groups ranging from verses about God's knowledge to human knowledge based on inference, experience, memory, rational analysis, and revelation. The question before this chapter is: what are some of the elements of this conception of knowledge that run through all of the verses about human knowledge? I argue below that these Qur'ānic verses are best understood as hinting at ways of defining knowledge in terms of certain natural and acquired epistemic dispositions or virtues. I look at these verses from a virtue-theoretic perspective and argue that knowledge for the Qur'ān seems to involve effective exercise of our perceptual, rational, or intuitive competencies or faculties as well as acquired dispositions or virtues.

3.2 Perceptual Knowledge

Let us look at perceptual knowledge first. It is based on sensory stimulation. Many of these stimuli simply come upon us, while others are actively sought by us.¹ We are rather "passive" recipients of the first kind while the second kind involve our "deliberate" effort. Perceptual knowledge can be had based on the percepts formed on the

¹For the distinction between active and passive perceptual knowledge see Pritchard (2016, 30).

basis of both kind of stimuli. Contemporary discussions in virtue epistemology sometimes take ordinary perceptual knowledge to be what is called “passive” knowledge (Pritchard 2016, 30), claiming that as epistemic agents we do not deserve any credit for such knowledge. This idea is sometimes used against credit theory of knowledge as a counterexample.² The claim is that there is nothing that the epistemic agent does in attaining ordinary perceptual knowledge, for example through vision or hearing, and, hence, she cannot be credited with attaining true beliefs through passive perception. To put the matter in a slightly different way, the argument is that since the epistemic agent does not exercise any virtue in attaining such knowledge and it is gained only through more or less automatic functioning of perceptual faculties, we have no grounds for crediting the agent with attainment of such knowledge. However, both virtue responsibilists and virtue reliabilists have argued that the epistemic agent deserves credit for perceptual knowledge because she attains it either by exercise of acquired virtues or by reliable functioning of her perceptual faculties. In fact it has been argued by Stephan Napier (2008) that an epistemic agent must perform acts of virtue to attain perceptual knowledge and, hence, even a reliabilist position about knowledge actually has a responsibilist element to it.

If this line of thought in virtue epistemology is right, it becomes easier to see why the Qur'ān holds epistemic agents responsible for the exercise of their faculties and blames those who fail to do so. There are several places where the Qur'ān criticizes those who fail to see or hear, etc., despite having the relevant faculties. It states, for example:

And We have certainly created for Hell many of the jinn and mankind. They have hearts with which they do not understand, they have eyes with which they do not see, and they have ears with which they do not hear. Those are like livestock; rather, they are more astray. It is they who are the heedless. (7:179)

Those who are being criticized here are in a state of “heedlessness.” What that seems to mean is that despite having the ability to understand³ they do not exercise it; despite having the ability to see, they do not exercise it; and despite having the ability to hear, they do not exercise it. Obviously the verse does not mean to suggest that such people have shut their minds, eyes, and ears literally. The idea seems to be that such people do not exercise these faculties *responsibly* or with proper attention. This is a great epistemic failure in the eyes of the Qur'ān and, hence, it declares such people to be worse than livestock in being astray. Hence, people are *responsible*, as far as the Qur'ān is concerned, for the exercise of their perceptual and intellectual

²This idea, along with testimonial knowledge, is used as an argument against the so-called credit view of knowledge advocated by Ernest Sosa (2007, 92 onwards), John Greco (2003, 117), and Wayne Riggs (2007, 336–41). To put it very roughly and without an eye to variations in their respective positions, these thinkers claim that knowledge is true belief attained by the epistemic agent through the exercise of her abilities/competence. Such exercise of epistemic abilities makes the agent creditworthy for attaining true belief. Zagzebsky (1996, 2009) also has a credit view of knowledge and, hence, is open to the same challenge.

³The Qur'ānic term *qulūb* used here means heart-mind and stands for the faculty of understanding in this context. A lot of the times the Qur'ān uses the term *fuād*, plural *afdata*, to signify heart-mind which stands for consciousness as a whole including its emotive aspect.

dispositions or faculties. Failure to do so makes one epistemically heedless or unconscientious. This attitude is deeply blameworthy for the Qur'ān in a moral sense as well.

From the point of view of our concerns here, it appears that attentive exercise of perceptual and intellectual abilities is a matter of *responsibility* and *we gain knowledge through such an exercise*. Otherwise we end up in a state of heedlessness, where we are more astray than animals.

Therefore, as far as perceptual knowledge is concerned, the Qur'ān seems to take it to be a product of exercise of our perceptual faculties in an epistemically conscientious way.

That experience in general is a source of knowledge for the Qur'ān is further corroborated by the following verses:

By experiencing punishment, Pharaoh said, you'll come to *know* (the reality). (7:123)

And Allah brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers knowing nothing, and gave you hearing and sight and hearts that haply ye might give thanks. (16:78)

(O man), follow not that whereof thou hast no knowledge. Lo! the hearing and the sight and the heart – of each of these it will be asked. (17:36)

They will know [by experience] who is worse in position and who is weaker as an army. (19:75)

[Pharaoh said]: ye shall know for certain [after experiencing my punishments] which of us hath sterner and more lasting punishment. (20:71)

They will know, when they behold the doom, who is more astray as to the road. (25:42)

(Pharaoh) said: Ye put your faith in him (Moses) before I give you leave. Lo! he doubtless is your chief who taught you magic! But verily ye shall come to know. Verily I will cut off your hands and your feet alternately, and verily I will crucify you every one. (26:49)

And Pharaoh said: O chiefs! I know not that ye have a god other than me, so kindle for me (a fire), O Haman, to bake the mud; and set up for me a lofty tower in order that I may survey the god of Moses; and lo! I deem him of the liars. (28:38)

And if We would, We could show them unto thee (Muhammad) so that thou shouldst know them surely by their marks. And thou shalt know them by the burden of their talk. And Allah knoweth your deeds. (47:30)

(Unto their warner it was said): To-morrow they (Thamud) will know who is the rash liar. (54:26)

And verily ye know the first creation. Why, then, do ye not reflect? (on experience) (56:62)

Nay, verily. Lo! We created them from what they know. (70:39)

Till (the day) when they shall behold that which they are promised (they may doubt); but then they will know (for certain) who is weaker in allies and less in multitude. (72:24)

Who (guardians) know (all) that ye do. (82:12)

These and many similar verses in the Qur'ān talk about knowledge through experience of some sort. In fact experience is said to be a source of knowing with “surety” or certainty. It is also stated in 17:36 that we are going to be held accountable for our perceptual and intellectual faculties.

But as the verse below shows, the knowledge gained through experience or observation is taken by the Qur'ān to function as a basis for further knowledge to be gained through reason. Rational knowledge, it appears, is mostly built on the basis of knowledge gained through observing the phenomena in the world. Perceptual

knowledge, therefore, is basic or primary in such cases of rational knowledge. Verses like the following one are a testimony to this Qur'ānic position:

Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and earth, and the alternation of the night and the day, and the [great] ships which sail through the sea with that which benefits people, and what Allah has sent down from the heavens of rain, giving life thereby to the earth after its lifelessness and dispersing therein every [kind of] moving creature, and [His] directing of the winds and the clouds controlled between the heaven and the earth are signs for a people who use reason. (2:164)

The verse appears to underscore clearly that the deeper rational understanding of the observable phenomena in the world comes through the exercise of reason on the observable in nature. But, as noted above, before reasoning about its deeper meanings, we have to observe the world *responsibly or conscientiously*. This order of priority between perceptual and intellectual knowledge can be seen in verse 17:12 discussed under the next heading. In this regard the Qur'ānic position seems similar to the empiricist position.

3.3 Intellectual Knowledge

The Qur'ān greatly emphasizes the use of intellect or reason to gain knowledge and understanding. Reason is understood to be an ability which humans are expected to exercise to reach correct judgments. Deliberate failure to exercise the ability to reason or the intellectual disposition to reach (possibly) correct judgments makes us epistemically and morally culpable in the sight of the Qur'ān. This, once again, appears to be an epistemically responsibilist attitude. Verses like the following one clearly underscore the point that reason is taken as ability by the Qur'ān that we are responsible to exercise:

Indeed, the worst of living creatures in the sight of Allah are the deaf and dumb who do not use reason. (8:22)

This is a telling verse about human epistemic responsibility in connection with the use of reason or intellectual capacity/disposition to make correct judgments in life. Failure to do so is equivalent to being deaf and dumb and makes humans the worst of living beings. I read the use of the word “worst” in this context to be both moral and epistemic. It appears that the Qur'ān blends moral and epistemic responsibilities in this context and, hence, a virtue theory derived from the Qur'ān will not only have to cover both epistemic and moral types of virtue but also underscore the blending of these different types of virtue in various contexts of life. In any case, this verse is a crucial statement about our reason or intellect being an ability or capacity that we are responsible to exercise. Not doing so makes us blameworthy.⁴

⁴Booth (2016, 53) notes that medieval Islamic philosophers also hold that one is responsible for the contents of her/his beliefs insofar as one has control over one's mind to set it up to receive knowledge of first principles from the active intellect. Of course Booth's discussion is in the context of Neo-Platonist Islamic philosophy rather than the Qur'ān which seemingly places a more direct responsibility on our shoulders for exercise of our reason.

Another important verse in this regard reads as follows:

Do you order righteousness of the people and forget yourselves while you recite the Scripture? Then will you not reason? (2:44)

The idea in this verse is that ordering righteousness of the people rationally implies that one should practice it herself/himself as well. Not to extend the same righteousness to oneself is a failure to exercise reason or intellectual ability. The unstated implication of the verse is that *one is morally and epistemically responsible for exercising one's intellectual ability and accrues blame for not doing so.*

The Qur'ān points to some specific examples of the way we are expected to use our intellectual ability:

And We appoint the night and the day two portents. Then We make dark the portent of the night, and We make the portent of the day sight-giving, that ye may seek bounty from your Lord, and that ye may know the computation of the years, and the reckoning; and everything have We expounded with a clear expounding. (17:12)

The verse notes that from the observation of day and night we can reason to computation of years. This type of exercise of reason obviously helps us understand patterns in the working of Nature. (Here the Qur'ān also underscores to have expounded this matter with clarity – a cherished epistemic value for the Qur'ān.)

The following verse talks about the ability to draw correct inferences from given information:

And when there comes to them information about [public] security or fear, they spread it around. But if they had referred it back to the Messenger or to those of authority among them, *then the ones who [can] draw correct conclusions from it would have known about it.* And if not for the favor of Allah upon you and His mercy, you would have followed Satan, except for a few. (4:83) (Italics added)

The italicized portion is where the Qur'ān talks about drawing correct inferences. This (virtue or skill) is also a part of our intellectual ability and we are supposed to exercise it in a responsible way, i.e., draw correct conclusions.

The overall point, however, is that for the Qur'ān reasoning is an ability or competence that we can and must exercise. If that were not the case, the Qur'ān would not hold us accountable in relation to its exercise or failure thereof.

Let us look at one more example where the Qur'ān talks about the use of reason/discussion/ argument to help form correct religious belief.

Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided. (16:125)

The basic epistemic point of this verse seems to be that argument or reasoning can help lead to correct belief if used in an appropriate way. This is how we can gain knowledge. That is, if we argue in a way that is best, we can reach correct or true beliefs. It appears that there is no other way to interpret the phrase “argue in a way

that is best” except in terms of intellectual virtues. *There are certain norms or virtues of arguing which we are required to put into practice in order for us to be able to achieve the correct conclusions or beliefs.* That is what the Qur’ān exhorts us as epistemic agents to do. Hence, the Qur’ān’s attitude toward the use of reason is a virtue-based attitude.

3.4 Knowledge by Revelation

There are 78 occurrences of the trilateral root *waw-ha-ya*, the root for the Arabic word for revelation, in the Qur’ān. Revelation is a crucial part of the Qur’ānic epistemology. In verse 6:50 the Qur’ān equates revelation with sight by saying that the Prophet does not have knowledge of the unseen; he only follows revelation; the blind person and the one with sight cannot be equal. This suggests that in revelation things are known in a way analogous to the way they are known through perception. When something is revealed, it comes out in the open for us to see. As noted by Richard Swinburne (2007, 1) and Mats Wahlberg (2014, 28–34) there are two ways in which revelation might take place, according to theological literature. One is called *manifestational* revelation and the other *propositional*. In the first case God can reveal Himself in a natural event or sign and, in the second, He reveals Himself through truths expressed in propositions (language). According to the Islamic tradition, the Qur’ān is literally “the word of God” or *al-kalam-ullah*. Which means that when we talk about the Qur’ān, we are talking about *propositional* revelation.⁵

However, it appears that the Qur’ān uses the verb *wah* in more than one sense and it can mean instinctive insight, inspiration (right or wrong), or prophetic revelation. The following verses exemplify different meanings with which the verb is used:

And your Lord inspired to the bee, “Take for yourself among the mountains, houses, and among the trees and [in] that which they construct.” (16:68)

Here the word *awhā* is used to refer to the instinctive insight that bees have for constructing their hives.

But even devils can inspire people to do things.

And do not eat of that upon which the name of Allah has not been mentioned, for indeed, it is grave disobedience. And indeed do the devils inspire their allies [among men] to dispute with you. And if you were to obey them, indeed, you would be associators [of others with Him]. (6:121)

This verse points to the possibility of evil inspiration in human beings. It appears like evil inner whisperings.

⁵On the question of what it means for God to speak to humans in the literal sense, there is a long tradition of theories beginning with medieval Muslim philosophers like al-Farabi and Avicenna and extending to contemporary thinkers like Fazlur Rahman (2011). Rahman’s own position can be found in the chapter on revelation in his *Major Themes of the Qur’ān* (2009). In a recent discussion of the matter Nicholas Wolterstorff (1995) offers a comprehensive theory on the subject couched in the language of contemporary analytic philosophy.

However, the most important technical sense in which the Qur'ān uses the verb for revelation pertains to revelation received by prophets from God throughout history. The Qur'ān says:

Indeed, We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], as We revealed to Noah and the prophets after him. And we revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, the Descendants, Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and to David We gave the book [of Psalms]. (4:163)

But inspirational knowledge of a different quality than that of the prophets can come to non-prophets as well. The Qur'ān mentions the inspirational knowledge that God gave to the mother of Prophet Moses in order to save her child (Moses) from Pharaoh.

When We inspired to your mother what We inspired. (20:38)

And We inspired to the mother of Moses, "Suckle him; but when you fear for him, cast him into the river and do not fear and do not grieve. Indeed, We will return him to you and will make him [one] of the messengers." (28:7)

The overall point that emerges from an epistemological take on these verses is that humans do have the capacity for receiving revelation or inspiration. It exists as instinct even at the animal level. Only prophets received revelation in the technical sense of the word *wahy*. But poets, artists, mystics, and even ordinary people can receive inspirational thoughts. These thoughts are not revelation in the Prophetic sense but they are new and inventive outlooks on worldly or spiritual and artistic matters. These thoughts can and do play a role in taking us to true beliefs. However, at the ordinary human level, inspiration is not revelation in the technical prophetic sense and, hence, is subject to careful rational analysis before it can yield true belief and knowledge. As noted above, the Qur'ān is explicit about asserting that such inspiration can be both good and devilish. Hence, we need criteria for establishing the correctness of inspirations. But such criteria can be forthcoming only through our perceptual and intellectual capacities. How else can humans judge the correctness of any inspired beliefs? Therefore, the criteria for checking the veridicality of inspiration or intuition are going to be the same as the ones employed in the case of perceptual or intellectual knowledge.

As far as prophetic revelation is concerned, the Qur'ān appears to equate it with sight in 6:50:

Say, [O Muhammad], "I do not tell you that I have the depositories [containing the provision] of Allah or that I know the unseen, nor do I tell you that I am an angel. I only follow what is revealed to me." Say, "Is the blind equivalent to the seeing? Then will you not give thought?"

So in the prophetic revelation there is something like a direct experience of reality or truth. According to Islamic thinkers like Mohammad Iqbal, such a direct experience of reality provides the prophet with values and truths/insights that can transform the lives of individuals and societies. The test of the veridicality of such revelation is its practical impact in morally and spiritually uplifting and transforming people's lives. If this pragmatic test of truth is accepted, then we can look only

to history for learning the truth of the beliefs advocated by prophetic revelation.⁶ The criteria of truth in this case are actually the impact of the beliefs advocated by revelation on human history at the individual and collective level. But such impact is known by ordinary human beings only through observation and rational analysis. Therefore, while faith in the veracity of prophetic revelation is central to Islam, the epistemic tool that ordinary people can muster to understand revelation is through observing the impact of revelation on individuals and societies in history. Hence, revelation has a dual epistemic status: for the prophet it is a source of direct knowledge of reality; for ordinary humans its impact in history is the data through which to get an indirect comprehension of reality. That the prophet has “seen” reality or truth can be known by us through knowing the impact of his revelation on our lives. But in gaining this knowledge we have the use of only our non-revelatory means of knowledge, i.e., observation, memory, and reason. Hence, *perceptual, memorial,⁷ and intellectual capacities or abilities are foundational to our knowledge of the impact of revelation on history.*

The crucial question about the nature of revelatory knowledge pertains to the way a prophet acquires this type of knowledge. True, the Qur'ān equates it with “sight,” but at the same time it makes the following comments:

And thus We have revealed to you an inspiration of Our command. You did not know what is the Book or [what is] faith, but We have made it a light by which We guide whom We will of Our servants. And indeed, [O Muhammad], you guide to a straight path. (42:52)

Say, “I am not something original among the messengers, nor do I know what will be done with me or with you. I only follow that which is revealed to me, and I am not but a clear warner.” (46:9)

It can be seen clearly from these verses that a prophet is someone who receives a divine command about things he does not know on his own, follows the command, and guides people to the straight path (of this command), warning them in the clearest possible terms. It appears, therefore, that *revelation to a prophet is a kind of testimonial knowledge,⁸ i.e., knowledge that he accepts on the epistemic authority of*

⁶See Muhammad Iqbal (2012) *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, particularly Lecture V.

⁷Although I have not discussed memorial knowledge here, the theme of remembrance in various forms is constantly present in the Qur'ān.

⁸As Mats Wahlberg defines it, testimonial knowledge is “knowledge gained from the spoken or written words of other people,” absent any reason for the hearer to think that the speaker is lying or misinformed (2014: 1). Most human knowledge is of this type. Only a small portion of our knowledge is acquired through personal observation or intellectual effort. The rest, even about our own biology, ancestry, community, history, and hard sciences like physics, etc., comes through the testimony of others. The true beliefs that we gain through the testimony of others, often given in books, are fully justified. Learning about some aspect of the theory of relativity, for example, through a textbook can give me justified true beliefs about relativity. In a nutshell, our lives generally depend on this kind of testimonial knowledge. Similarly, as Wahlberg argues effectively, our knowledge of God is mainly based on God's own testimony through revelation plus our use of natural reason. We can form justified true beliefs about God on the basis of revelation. Given the fact that we broadly accept testimony as a source of knowledge in ordinary life, we need to do the same in the case of God's testimony about His existence as well as His guidance for mankind.

someone other than himself, in this case God, and then acts upon and passes to others for similar action. Technically this is what happens in ordinary knowledge by testimony as well. We receive knowledge from someone who knows the matter in hand and we accept her/his testimony provided s/he does seem to fulfill normal conditions of trustworthiness.⁹ We then act on the received knowledge and, if need be, pass it on to others in a responsible fashion. A prophet is in an analogous situation.

This theme that revelation is testimonial and needs to be passed on truthfully is picked up by the Qur'ān itself. Indeed verse 6:19 calls revelation the *greatest testimony*. It says:

Say, "What thing is greatest in testimony?" Say, "Allah is witness between me and you. And this Qur'an was revealed to me that I may warn you thereby and whomever it reaches. Do you [truly] testify that with Allah there are other deities?" Say, "I will not testify [with you]." Say, "Indeed, He is but one God, and indeed, I am free of what you associate [with Him]."

This is an important verse. It not only underscores the nature of revelation as testimony but also points to its central message of theism and exhorts the Prophet to refuse to testify to polytheism. This idea is reinforced when the Qur'ān underscores the continuity of its revelation with earlier revelations to prophets from Noah to Jesus and insists that the same theistic message was given to all messengers. Verse 21:25 reads:

And We sent not before you any messenger except that We revealed to him that, "There is no deity except Me, so worship Me."

Clear implication here seems to be that revelation has served as testimony to the oneness of God through the ages. Indeed the Qur'ān seems to make this point explicitly in verse 6:106:

Follow, [O Muhammad], what has been revealed to you from your Lord - there is no deity except Him - and turn away from those who associate others with Allah.

The same is the case in the following verse:

Allah witnesses that there is no deity except Him, and [so do] the angels and those of knowledge - [that He is] maintaining [creation] in justice. There is no deity except Him, the Exalted in Might, the Wise. (3:18)

The Prophet is clearly exhorted here to follow the testimony of revelation when it comes to the matter of faith in oneness of God. God's word is the testimony for his existence and oneness. Faith in one God has to be based in such testimony more than any other form of knowledge. Only revelation can provide an insight into this

⁹Basically there are two views of testimonial knowledge in philosophical literature: reductionist and non-reductionist. Non-reductionists like J. L. Austin (1979) and many subsequent writers, claim that as long as the hearer does not have any relevant defeaters, i.e., relevant evidence to the contrary, s/he can acquire testimonial knowledge simply by the testimony of the speaker. The reductionists, among whom David Hume (1967) is the primary figure, believe that the hearer must be in possession of some independent positive reasons for accepting the testimony and only then can acquire testimonial knowledge.

reality of the “unseen,” as the Qur'ān calls it in the opening verses of its 2nd *surah*. Verse 11:49 mentions a similar idea:

That is from the news of the unseen which We reveal to you, [O Muhammad]. You knew it not, neither you nor your people, before this. So be patient; indeed, the [best] outcome is for the righteous.

There are other verses that touch upon the testimonial character of revelation. The Qur'ān also alerts the Prophet to be careful in receiving revelatory (testimonial) knowledge:

So high [above all] is Allah, the Sovereign, the Truth. And, [O Muhammad], do not hasten with [recitation of] the Qur'an before its revelation is completed to you, and say, “My Lord, increase me in knowledge.” (20:114)

A similar need for patience in regard to the revelation is underscored to the Prophet in 11:49, mentioned above. It is crucial to note that these verses exhort the Prophet to exercise the *virtue of epistemic patience* in receiving the revelations of the Qur'ān to have his knowledge increased. This is also analogous to the situation in which we receive ordinary testimonial knowledge. We can understand it properly only if we exercise epistemic patience in hearing it out. Only then can we be in a position to act upon it properly or, if need be, pass it on to others correctly. One must conclude, therefore, that there is a certain framework of epistemic virtues that one needs to exercise while receiving testimonial knowledge. Without exercise of such virtues or, in other words, *epistemic conscientiousness*, we cannot succeed in receiving testimonial knowledge.

The fact that modes of revelation to a prophet include revelation through a messenger (like Gabriel) from God also goes to show that knowledge gained by a prophet from revelation is testimonial knowledge. The Qur'ān says:

And it is not for any human being that Allah should speak to him except by revelation or from behind a partition or that He sends a messenger to reveal, by His permission, what He wills. Indeed, He is Most High and Wise. (42:51)

A messenger, in this case the Archangel Gabriel, passes the message to the Prophet, who then passes it on to the people. The term *al-rrasul*, used for some prophets in the Qur'ān, also means “messenger.” A messenger is technically someone who passes on information/knowledge received from others. S/he does not acquire the information/knowledge through exercise of her/his faculties. *The credit that s/he may deserve would be for being a conscientious and responsible recipient and/or reporter of the message.*

This ability to responsibly receive a message and conscientiously pass it on is the critical ability of a prophet for the Qur'ān. Its proper exercise is exhorted upon the Prophet of Islam. From the epistemological point of view, therefore, *receiving revelation properly* is a virtue for the Qur'ān and, hence, the Qur'ānic position on this score is consistent with its position regarding other epistemic abilities or competences. The credit that a prophet gains as an epistemic agent is for responsibly receiving and conscientiously passing on the knowledge revealed to him.

A word needs to be added here about the problem of distinguishing true prophet from an imposter or, in other words, a genuine recipient of revelatory testimonial knowledge from someone who simply fakes receiving such knowledge. Booth (2016, 60) discusses al-Farabi's solution to this problem in the light of his evaluation of Goldman's analysis (Goldman 2001) of the problem of determining the truth of one or two putative experts' testimony by a novice without becoming an expert herself. This is not the place to go into the details of Goldman's position on this issue and evaluate it. Booth's basic insight on the matter, however, is important. He concludes with the following regarding al-Farabi's position: "...[A]mong humans only the prophets, with their God-given, superior faculties of imagination, are able to attain this perfect cognitive state [of absolute certainty]. This means it is impossible for the prophet *not* to have perfect rhetorical and dialectical abilities with respect to his knowledge.... The prophet is thus *so* persuasive, and *so* dialectically skilled, because she not only knows the truth, but also understands it, that she cannot but persuade one of her testimonial trustworthiness."

A prophet's perfect cognitive state and perfect rhetorical and dialectical abilities make her absolutely trustworthy for those who properly open up their minds to her. In other words, for al-Farabi a prophet is an exemplar of testimonial trustworthiness, among other things. She cannot fail to persuade those who properly engage with her.

3.5 Overview of the Qur'ānic Hints About Knowledge

In light of the foregoing remarks about perceptual, intellectual, and revelatory knowledge, a number of things can be inferred about the Qur'ānic view on the nature of knowledge. First, it is clear that the Qur'ān holds epistemic agents responsible for proper exercise of their knowing faculties. Those who fail to properly exercise their perceptual or intellectual faculties are considered blameworthy. From this it follows immediately that there are certain virtues that are associated with being an epistemic agent in possession of certain knowing faculties. A proper or conscientious exercise of those virtues or competences is critically important because, otherwise, attainment of knowledge becomes impossible and humans can go astray. That also means that knowledge is for the most part attained through conscientious exercise of intellectual virtues. These include acquired virtues as well as natural epistemic faculties (or skills, abilities or competences as they are variously referred to by contemporary epistemologists).

In the Greek tradition, with the exception of Aristotle, virtues were generally taken as a subset of skills (see Bloomfield 2000, 23–43). Contemporary epistemologists differ in their views about whether or not this is so. Zagzebsky (1996, 106–16) rejects the idea that virtues are skills but Sosa (1994, 32; 2007, 23, 29) considers virtues, competences, and skills to be similar in nature. Sosa's position in this regard is, therefore, in consonance with the general Greek tradition. As Bloomfield notes, "[t]he idea that the virtues are skills was most extensively developed in the early

Platonic dialogues, especially in *Gorgias*, and by the Stoics....” (2000, 25). Without trying to adjudicate the issue as to whether or not virtues are a subset of skills, we follow the general Greek tradition here. This means that knowledge can be attained by a conscientious exercise of natural and acquired epistemic virtues which are basically skills. However, our approach to the distinction between the so-called natural and acquired virtues is somewhat different than the way it has been wielded by contemporary epistemologists. That should become clear through the discussion below.

One may ask at this point where the Qur'ānic hints about knowledge fall in relation to contemporary debate within virtue epistemology between virtue reliabilists and responsibilists. Philosophers like Sosa, Greco, and Goldman belong to the first group, while Zagzebsky, Montmarquet, and Code belong to the second. Here we'll take Sosa and Zagzebsky as representative philosophers for the two camps and compare their views to get a sense of the way knowledge is broadly understood by reliabilists and responsibilists. This is not to say, of course, that there are no internal variations between the advocates of each camp. Sosa, Greco, and Goldman all have different positions within the reliabilist camp as do Code, Montmarquet, and Zagzebsky within the responsibilist camp.

Ernest Sosa is the leading figure on the reliabilist side of contemporary virtue epistemology and argues that knowledge is successful performance on the part of a cognitive agent. Just as an archer can hit her target successfully, a cognitive agent can hit the target of forming an accurate belief. If the archer's success in hitting the target is caused by her skill at archery, then such a success is *adroit*. Similarly if a cognitive agent forms an accurate belief because of her exercise of a competence that she has, then her belief is also *adroit*. In *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge* (2007) Sosa defines knowledge as apt belief, i.e., a belief that is accurate *because* it is produced by the competence or skill of the epistemic agent. Since such a belief results from the competence or skill of the epistemic agent, it is creditable to her.

To this aptness condition, Sosa adds a safety condition in defining knowledge. The idea of Sosa's safety condition is that a belief *p* is safe if and only if “it would have been held only if (most likely) *p*” (2007, 25). In other words, *the epistemic agent believes that p only if p is true*.

So knowledge under this view is apt belief that meets the safety condition. But Sosa takes this type of knowledge to be what he calls animal knowledge. It lacks a *reflective* component as yet. What Sosa calls reflective knowledge is “apt belief aptly noted. If *K* represents animal knowledge and *K+* reflective knowledge, then the basic idea may be represented thus: $K + p \leftrightarrow KK p$ ” (32). This means that my reflective knowledge that there is a tree in front of me is my apt belief about my apt belief that there is a tree in front of me. *It is an aptly held belief about an apt belief*.

As noted above, Sosa formulates his epistemological views in terms of performances. This allows him to equate intellectual virtues with *skills*. These intellectual virtues or skills can be either *natural* like hearing or vision, or *acquired* like critical thinking or archery. Sosa takes faculties like hearing, vision, memory, introspection, induction, and deduction to be natural intellectual virtues. These virtues or faculties

yield true belief when they function/perform reliably under normal circumstances. Their functioning need not be intentional or conscious, though it can have both these qualities. Also, the faculties are not expected to perform well under extraordinary circumstances but just under normal ones. For example, our faculty of vision need not perform well in dim light; the expectation is that it will perform well in normal light and give us accurate perceptual beliefs about our surroundings.

Virtue responsibilists do not take our natural epistemic faculties to be virtues in the strict sense. Zagzebsky, for example, takes intellectual virtues to be acquired habits just as moral virtues are acquired habits in the Aristotelian tradition. As noted in the previous chapter, in her *Virtues of the Mind* she defines virtue as “a deep and enduring acquired excellence of a person, involving characteristic motivation to produce a certain desired end and reliable success in bringing about that end” (1996, 137). Intellectual virtues are distinguished from moral virtues by the fact that their aim is “cognitive contact with reality” (167). This means that these virtues aim at achieving ends like truth, knowledge, and understanding, etc.

The above definition of virtue makes it an *acquired* character trait rather than a *natural* faculty like vision or memory. This is a fundamental difference between Sosa and Zagzebsky. Zagzebsky’s definition also has two other parts that are important to note: each virtue involves a motivation to produce some desired end and it is reliable in *succeeding* to achieve that end. In a nutshell, a virtue is an acquired trait of character with a motivation to achieve a certain end in a reliable fashion. In the case of intellectual virtues the ultimate motivation is to come into “cognitive contact with reality” or know the truth in various situations with reliable success.

Zagzebsky takes traits like open-mindedness, intellectual fairness, intellectual humility, intellectual courage, perseverance, firmness, intellectual carefulness, and intellectual thoroughness to be intellectual virtues. Also, although she takes self-trust and trust of others as natural rather than acquired cognitive traits, she considers “proper epistemic trust” to be a virtue (2014, 280).

Zagzebsky takes these virtues to be a part of epistemic conscientiousness that a knower needs to maintain and exercise in order to be able to reach truth or knowledge or understanding, the ultimate goals of epistemic activity. Each of these virtues has its own immediate goal, related to these ultimate ends of intellectual virtues. Intellectual courage as a virtue, for example, has the immediate goal of maintaining one’s well-founded beliefs in the face of opposition. This immediate goal of the virtue of intellectual courage is grounded in the ultimate end of “cognitive contact with reality.” It must contribute ultimately to successful attainment of truth or knowledge or understanding (181).

Zagzebsky defines knowledge as belief produced by an act of intellectual virtue. An act of intellectual virtue has three features, according to Zagzebsky: (i) it arises out of a motivation part of the intellectual virtue concerned; (ii) it is an act characteristic of a person who has the concerned intellectual virtue; (iii) it is *successful* in achieving the immediate end of the concerned intellectual virtue plus the ultimate end of truth (175). In other words, one reaches true belief because of the exercise of intellectual virtue. The third component of an act of intellectual virtue, its reliable success, ensures such a thing. As such the idea that one reaches truth through the

exercise of an act of intellectual virtue is built into the definition of an act of intellectual virtue. This is important because Zagzebsky wants to block those cases of true belief in which one attains true belief accidentally. Hence, we can simply say that, for Zagzebsky, *knowledge is belief produced by an act of intellectual virtue*.

The key thing in this scenario from our point of view is that knowledge results from an intellectually virtuous action on the part of the epistemic agent. Since such an action aims at a goal and the agent exercises her intellectual virtue to attain the goal at hand, the agent is *responsible* for her act and deserves credit for the same. Exercise of an intellectual virtue, an acquired excellence of character, is an *intentional* act, and, hence, the agent is *responsible* for it. This is what distinguishes Zagzebsky's position from that of the reliabilists who take knowledge to be a product basically of reliably functioning *natural* faculties.

The question then is how to adjudicate between the reliabilists and the responsibilists? In fact a still more basic question would be: are these two positions mutually exclusive? It appears that the apparent cleavage between the two camps is a matter of emphasis only and these two positions are not mutually exclusive. A first shot at an argument for this claim would be to note that acquired intellectual virtues, however we may define virtue, depend upon properly functioning *natural* faculties. Without properly functioning or "trustworthy" natural faculties, we cannot engage in any acts of intellectual virtue. For example, I cannot be intellectually fair unless I have the rational ability (a natural faculty) to evaluate different ideas or points of view on a subject. So the acquired intellectual virtue of intellectual fairness can be exercised only when I have a trustworthy natural faculty of reason. Trustworthy natural faculties seem to be necessary for knowledge produced by acts of intellectual virtue.¹⁰ If this is correct, then the divide between the reliabilists and the responsibilists in virtue epistemology needs to be viewed in the perspective of a continuum of virtues where natural intellectual virtues are the starting point of our epistemic apparatus and acquired intellectual virtues supplement them, perhaps in varying degrees, at different levels at which our natural faculties function. The divide between these two positions is only apparent and seems to result from differences in emphasis on different features of the epistemic agent. Reliabilists lay greater emphasis on natural faculties and their reliable functioning, while responsibilists emphasize more the acquired intellectual traits of an epistemic agent's character and do not take natural faculties as virtues.

¹⁰ Greco (2000, 182–4) argues that Zagzebsky-style intellectual virtues are neither necessary nor sufficient for knowledge and in fact we need reliabilist virtues (reliably functioning faculties) for attaining knowledge. However he seems to de-emphasize the role of acquired intellectual virtues in the acquisition of knowledge. It seems to me that in high-grade knowledge (knowledge which is the product of sustained enquiry, for example) properly functioning faculties need to be supplemented by acquired intellectual virtues. Sosa (2007, 88) also considers competences, which for him include reliable natural faculties as well as acquired virtues (2007, 86), as playing a constitutive role in attaining true beliefs that reach the status of knowledge. I take him to mean that natural faculties/virtues are presupposed by application of virtues derived from learning, i.e., acquired virtues.

As noted earlier, the Qur'ān holds epistemic agents responsible for a proper or conscientious exercise of natural faculties. It was noted in Chap. 2 that the Qur'ānic verses about blameworthy ignorance presuppose a number of intellectual virtues such as open-mindedness and fairness. Intellectual conscientiousness was found to be of particular significance in the Qur'ānic scheme of acquired epistemic virtues. From these two considerations it follows that Qur'ānic epistemology takes both natural faculties and acquired epistemic virtues to be significant for attaining knowledge and understanding as well as wisdom (see the chapter on wisdom below). Therefore, the most important question is: how are the natural faculties and acquired intellectual virtues related to each other? Is it the case, for example, that natural faculties play a *constitutive* role in acquisition of knowledge while the role of acquired intellectual virtues like open-mindedness, intellectual courage, and intellectual fairness, is only *auxiliary*? Here I want to argue that in *unintentionally* acquired knowledge, which will include passive knowledge of certain situations, the role of natural faculties is fundamental and constitutive of knowledge. However, most of the rest of our knowledge, including most of our ordinary knowledge through perception, memory, and testimony, is *intentionally* acquired knowledge and both our natural faculties and acquired epistemic character traits play a constitutive role in it.

Let me clarify the distinction between intentionally and non-intentionally acquired knowledge. There are two types of uses of a natural faculty or competence or power like vision or hearing that we can make, intentional and non-intentional. For example, when a mechanic looks underneath the hood of my car to figure out why the engine won't start, he is making an *intentional* use of the power of vision. However, when the light in my room suddenly goes off, my perceptual knowledge of the darkness in the room comes upon me without any involvement of my *intention*. This latter exercise of my power of vision is *non-intentional*. My plea is that knowledge gained through such non-intentional functioning of our natural faculties (or competences or powers) does not involve any of our acquired intellectual virtues. Such knowledge is purely a function of natural faculties or virtues. Much of the knowledge that children possess is in this category.

The overwhelming quantity of the knowledge that adult humans acquire, including most of their perceptual, memorial, and testimonial knowledge, involves some degree of *intentionality* in this sense. This intentionality is part of the exercise of both our natural epistemic faculties and our acts of acquired intellectual virtues. Zagzebsky confines the *motivational* component only to the exercise of acquired intellectual virtues but, as has been pointed out by Stephan Napier, epistemic motivation is involved with even perception and memory through *attention*. Napier cites a number of studies by empirical psychologists to make his point and says that “[a]ttention is the directed allocation of cognitive resources to *fully* process a stimulus” (Napier 2008, 41). It seems hard, however, not to allow that some cognitive resources are allocated by us for processing stimuli even at the level of passive knowledge, although such allocation will not be intentional at that level.

I think it is reasonable to assume that other natural faculties, such as the ones mentioned by Sosa, also involve attention as a component in varying degrees. Some allocation of cognitive resources might be *unintended* in cases of passive knowledge and we may not call it *attention*, but allocation of cognitive resources is definitely *intended* in cases of actively sought knowledge. Hence, natural faculties cannot be claimed to function without *intentionality* except in cases of passive knowledge. Zagzebsky makes a related point when she says that intellectual virtues like attentiveness, intellectual carefulness, and intellectual thoroughness follow immediately from the fact that we trust our own faculties (2014, 281). She is right that these virtues will make no sense if we do not take our faculties to be reliable or trustworthy. But it appears that in cases of actively sought knowledge our trustworthy faculties function effectively only through *attentiveness* on our part. Hence, if this is an acceptable claim, then most of our actively acquired knowledge through the use of reliably functioning natural faculties will involve acts of acquired intellectual virtues in a *constitutive* way because it will involve attentiveness at the minimum and such attentiveness will have to be *conscientious*.

I take it, therefore, that apart from *unintentional* exercise of our epistemic faculties, most of our knowledge involves *intentionality* or *attentiveness* or epistemic motivation. Hence, a sharp distinction between the role of natural faculties (as virtues) and acquired intellectual virtues cannot be drawn effectively except at the level of *non-intentional* uses of our natural cognitive faculties. As a result we can say that while we have some non-intentionally acquired knowledge, as do children, most of the rest of our knowledge is produced by a combined role of natural cognitive faculties and acquired intellectual virtue. This latter type of knowledge, i.e., intentionally acquired knowledge, is best understood through a combined reliabilist/responsibilist approach.¹¹

If these remarks are in the right direction, then the Qur'ānic ascription of responsibility to epistemic agents for failing to exercise natural cognitive faculties such as reason and perception, etc., or failing to exercise acquired intellectual virtue of conscientiousness becomes fully understandable. We need to “allocate” our “cognitive resources” properly in order to get to know things. Otherwise we do become blameworthy for epistemic failure. Of course, our cognitive resources include both natural faculties and acquired intellectual virtues.

¹¹ That these two positions can be usefully combined comes out effectively from some recent analyses such as Juan Comesaña's “Evidentialist Reliabilism,” where he argues that both evidentialism, an internalist position upon which responsibilism is based, and reliabilism can benefit from a combination of these two approaches in epistemology (Comesaña 2010). For how evidentialism can connect with acquired intellectual virtues see Jason Baehr (2009). Alvin Goldman (2011) also proposes a synthesis of reliabilism and evidentialism. Ernest Sosa (2004) suggests in a similar vein that both internalism and externalism may be right.

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Chapter 4

Taqwā or Reflective Conscience in the Qur'ān and Some Additional Epistemic Virtues



4.1 Introduction

There are a number of fundamental epistemic virtues that verses of the Qur'ān underscore. Some of these, noted in Chap. 2, are: Epistemic responsibility of being open to evidence or epistemic conscientiousness; rational capacity to evaluate ideas before adopting them; epistemic fairness; avoidance of epistemic lapse or failure to exercise some relevant epistemic virtue or epistemic vigilance; epistemic humility; fairness in regard to oneself or reasonable self-respect; caring for what is right; responsibility of accepting only trustworthy testimony; knowing the proper extent of one's capacities; rational analysis of ideas; patience to get all the facts right; avoiding prejudice by being open to relevant facts; openness to the truth of revelation.

There are many other epistemic virtues mentioned in the Qur'ān in different contexts. This chapter will develop the Qur'ānic concept of *taqwā* as reflective conscience and the way it relates to specific virtues. Furthermore, we'll identify some additional epistemic virtues implied by the Qur'ānic verses. The point of the chapter is that epistemic virtues in the Qur'ān seem to be a part of *taqwā* or a comprehensive conscience which is foundational to all virtue, moral as well as epistemic, for the Qur'ān. This conscience is the pivot around which all virtues revolve, and epistemic ethics flows out of it.

4.2 The Concept of *Taqwā* in the Qur'ān

What is the conception of moral virtue in the Qur'ān and how does it relate to epistemic virtues in the worldview of the Qur'ān? I think we can try to answer these questions by first looking at some of the important moral terms and concepts of the

Qur'ān, and then relating our findings about these crucial moral concepts with epistemic virtues mentioned in the Qur'ān.

Although *Taqwā* is considered by some scholars (Rahman, 28) to be the central moral term or concept in the Qur'ān, a number of other ethical terms are also used and some of them are closely related with *taqwā*. These include terms like *birr* (piety or righteousness), *ḥasan* (pleasing, beautiful or admirable), *khayr* (good), *ṭayyib* (delightful or pure), *ma'ruf* (good or well-known), *ṣāliḥ* (righteous or good), and *'adl* and *qisṭ* (justice). In various contexts the Qur'ān clearly relates some of these terms with *taqwā*. For example, *birr* is related to *taqwā* in the following verse:

Righteousness (*birr*) is not that you turn your faces toward the east or the west, but [true] righteousness (*birr*) is [in] one who believes in Allah, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets and gives wealth, in spite of love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveler, those who ask [for help], and for freeing slaves; [and who] establishes prayer and gives *ṣalāt*; [those who] fulfill their promise when they promise; and [those who] are patient in poverty and hardship and during battle. Those are the ones who have been true, and it is those who are the righteous. (*al-muttaqun*). (2:177)

While defining *birr*, this verse clearly relates it to *taqwā*. The same relation between the two terms can be found in verses 2:189, 5:2, and 58:9. Similarly the etymological variants of the root *ḥ-s-n*, from which *ḥasan* (pleasing or beautiful) comes, are related with *taqwā* in verses 4:128, 5:93, and 12:90.

They said, "Are you indeed Joseph?" He said "I am Joseph, and this is my brother. Allah has certainly favored us. Indeed, he who fears Allah and is patient, then indeed, Allah does not allow to be lost the reward of those who do good."

The terms translated as "fear Allah" and "do good" are variants of the etymological roots for *taqwā* and *ḥasan*. The same is true for the translation of 5:93 which also relates *ṣāliḥāt* with *taqwā*:

There is not upon those who believe and do righteousness [*ṣāliḥāt*] [any] blame concerning what they have eaten [in the past] if they [now] fear Allah and believe and do righteous deeds, and then fear Allah and believe, and then fear Allah and do good; and Allah loves the doers of good.

Verses 41:33 and 13:29 relate *ṣāliḥāt* and *ḥ-s-n* while verses 16:90 and 2:236 relate *ḥ-s-n* with *'adl* and *ma'ruf* respectively.

This is meant just to give a glimpse of direct and indirect relations between the moral terms mentioned above and *taqwā*, which is our basic concern here. Fazlur Rahman, a leading twentieth century Muslim thinker, has argued that the concepts of *iman*, *islam*, and *taqwā*, which primarily stand for "faith," "submission" to God, and "[general] righteousness" are closely related to each other in the ethical world view of the Qur'ān (Rahman 1983, 170–85). *Iman* is usually translated as "belief" or "faith." Its Arabic root *a-m-n* means "safety" and "peace" in some of its forms. Hence, *iman* means "being safe through faith" in God. Similarly *islam*, which comes from the root *s-l-m*, means "peace" or "safety" or "greetings of peace." The term *taqwā* comes from the root *w-q-y*, "to protect" or "to preserve." As Rahman notes, the word *taqwā* itself means "to protect oneself from possible danger or

attack” (176). All three terms are linked with “safety,” “peace,” and “protection” in their connotations in the Arabic language. *Iman* or faith has an inner dimension, while *islam* basically connotes an external form of religious life at the personal and collective level, and *taqwā* or piety or righteousness combines *iman* and *islam* in helping its possessor live a morally and religiously upright life. This centrality of *taqwā* makes it crucial for our purpose here, which is to develop a Qur'ānic concept of virtue.

In this regard the first question before us is: what is the nature of *taqwā* and how can it help humans live a morally and religiously upright life? According to Fazlur Rahman, in its possibly earliest use in the Qur'ān at 91:8, the word probably means “righteousness.” The Qur'ān says:

And [by] the soul and He who proportioned it

And inspired it [with discernment of] its wickedness and its righteousness. (91:7–8)

This meaning of the word *taqwā* continues in its later uses (Rahman 1983, 177). But as noted above, the word literally means “to protect oneself from possible danger or attack.” The basic function of *taqwā* appears to be protective. It is righteousness aiming at protecting oneself from the dangers of wrongdoings. *It helps us discern what the right thing to do is in any given situation and to do the right thing in the situation at hand to save us from the perils of wrongdoing.* If this is the core of the concept of *taqwā* in the Qur'ān (compare with 40:9, where this meaning of the verb *wafa* is implied), we can ask whether or not human beings are born with *taqwā*. From the text of the Qur'ān, it comes out clearly that while the ability to distinguish between right and wrong is something given to the human *nafs* or self (91:7–8), one has to build upon this ability through faith-based right actions to inculcate *taqwā* in his/her person. That *taqwā* can be learned or inculcated comes out clearly from the following verse:

And those who are guided – He increases them in guidance and gives them their righteousness (*taqwāhum*). (47:17)

This verse seems to state clearly that to those who are guided, that is, do the right thing, God increases their guidance and bestows *taqwā* or righteousness on them (compare with 6:153). It is an important verse insofar as it points to the (psychological) principle that for those who are on the right path, their ability to stay on it increases with time provided they do stay on it. Aristotle made a similar point when he said: “For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g., men become builders by building and lyre players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, Chap. 1).

This verse is also important because it says that *taqwā* is given to those who stay the guided course, that is, keep doing the right thing. Hence, while *taqwā* has a basis in the natural ability of humans to distinguish right from wrong (91:7–8), it is not just that. One must distinguish right from wrong and then keep doing the right thing

in order to attain fuller *taqwā*. Indeed the Qur'ān says that people's hearts are tested for their *taqwā* by situations in which they choose to act righteously:

Indeed, those who lower their voices before the Messenger of Allah – they are the ones whose hearts Allah has tested for righteousness (*taqwā*). For them is forgiveness and great reward. (49:3)

What this “testing” means is that every choice one makes tests the disposition of her/his heart for *taqwā*, i.e., for distinguishing right from wrong and then choosing right. Obviously if one chooses to stay on the right path, her/his *taqwā* increases, but if one does the opposite and chooses to do what is wrong, one's *taqwā* is decreased. One's ability to distinguish right from wrong and to do the right thing is corrupted or dulled.

If this analysis is correct, then *taqwā* seems to be an *acquired* trait of mind or character. Hence, it is the closest Qur'ānic analogue of virtue or righteousness.

Let us look at some other features of *taqwā* as understood by the Qur'ān. We have already noted above that the Qur'ān relates a variety of its other ethical terms, directly or indirectly, with *taqwā*. It also comes out from the verses of the Qur'ān that many particular acts of virtue are placed under the umbrella of *taqwā*. This can be seen from verse 2:177 quoted above, for example. Religious and social virtues like faith, prayers, philanthropy, social sensitivity for the rights of enslaved human beings, fulfillment of promise, and patience in poverty or hardship and battle are all subsumed under *taqwā*. It is clear, therefore, that *taqwā* is not this or that particular virtue but “virtue in general” from which particular virtues or virtuous acts flow or in which particular virtues are rooted. It is a kind of orientation/disposition of the mind and character from which particular virtuous acts flow. No wonder, then that the Qur'ān describes *taqwā* as a sort of foundation in the following verse:

Then is one who laid the foundation of his building on righteousness (*taqwā*) [with fear] from Allah and [seeking] His approval better or one who laid the foundation of his building on the edge of a bank about to collapse, so it collapsed with him into the fire of Hell? And Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people. (9:109)

Laying the foundation of one's building on righteousness or *taqwā* obviously means “basing” one's character in *taqwā*. We can safely say, therefore, that *taqwā* is a foundational orientation or disposition of character from which particular virtuous acts flow.

Similarly the Qur'ān likens *taqwā* with “clothing” in the following verse:

O children of Adam, We have bestowed upon you clothing to conceal your private parts and as adornment. But the clothing of righteousness (*taqwā*) – that is best. That is from the signs of Allah that perhaps they will remember. (7:26)

This metaphor can be interpreted in more than one way but I think it lends itself to the interpretation that righteousness or *taqwā* covers all human actions just as ordinary clothing covers all of the human body. Taken in this sense, *taqwā* is obviously *general* in its nature and particular virtues or virtuous acts are covered by it or flow from it.

Second, the Qur'ān links *taqwā* with “the best outcome” or what we may call success. It says:

And enjoin prayer upon your family [and people] and be steadfast therein. We ask you not for provision; We provide for you, and the [best] outcome is for [those of] righteousness (*taqwā*). (20:132)

The idea here is that acts flowing from *taqwā* are going to produce the best outcome for those who perform them (see also 11:49 and 78:31, among others). In other words, such acts produce comprehensive success for those who do them. Indeed, as the following verse (also see verses 3:133, 13:35 and 15:45, among others) shows, the ultimate success in the Hereafter is also linked to *taqwā*:

That is Paradise, which We give as inheritance to those of Our servants who were fearing of Allah (*man kana taqiyya*). (19:63)

The phrase *man kana taqiyya* means “those who showed *taqwā*.”

Third, there is a link in the Qur'ānic view between *taqwā* and impulse because, as the following verse notes, evil impulse can be resisted by people of *taqwā*:

Indeed, those who fear Allah (have *taqwā*) – when an impulse touches them from Satan, they remember [Him] and at once they have insight. (7:201)

What having insight because of *taqwā* seems to mean here is that evil or satanic impulses are exposed to their hearts as evil or satanic. The implication is that *taqwā* helps its possessor have the right motivation or impulse. As soon as such a person is touched by an evil impulse, s/he remembers (is alerted) and stays away from following it. So a person with [habituated] *taqwā* generally follows the right impulse or motivation. Here again *taqwā* has a protective function: it protects us from evil impulses.

From the foregoing it is clear that the Qur'ānic concept of *taqwā* has at least the following elements:

1. *Taqwā* has its basis in a natural ability of humans to distinguish right from wrong.
2. This natural basis is built upon to acquire a stable orientation or disposition of character for doing the right thing through making an effort to stay on the right (guided) course. Hence, *taqwā* is an acquired stable disposition or orientation of character built upon a naturally given *basis*.
3. *Taqwā* is foundational and general in nature and all specific virtues stem from it. It is the root of virtues, so to speak.
4. *Taqwā* produces the best outcome for the agent through performance of actions rooted in it. In other words, *taqwā* is linked with success.
5. *Taqwā* protects humans from evil impulses and, thereby, makes them act from right motivation.

What do these elements of *taqwā*, as understood by the Qur'ān, boil down to? Fazlur Rahman thinks that *taqwā* is the Qur'ānic equivalent of *conscience*. He says the following in this regard:

Considering all the verses in the Qur'ān related to this concept, perhaps the best way to define *taqwā* is to say that, whereas action belongs to man, real and effective judgment upon that action, as well as the standard whereby that action is to be judged, lie outside of him. Similarly, in the case of the collective performance of a society, both the final criterion of judgment upon it and the judgment itself transcend that society. When a man or a society is fully conscious of this while conducting himself or itself, he or it has true *taqwā*. This idea can be effectively conveyed by the term “conscience” if the object of conscience transcends it. This is why it is proper to say that “conscience” is truly as central to Islam as love is to Christianity when one speaks of the human response to the ultimate reality—which, therefore, is conceived in Islam as merciful justice rather than fatherhood. (Rahman 2009, 29)

Here Rahman not only equates *taqwā* with *conscience* but also underscores the objectivity and transcendence of moral standards and ultimate judgment on the real worth of human actions. From our point of view here, though, the important point is the equation of *taqwā* with conscience. Among contemporary virtue epistemologists, Montmarquet uses the phrase “epistemic conscientiousness” for our desire for truth in different situations (1993, viii) and claims that intellectual virtues are a product of this desire (27–8). I draw attention to Montmarquet’s position here to point to the parallel between *taqwā* as conscience and “epistemic conscientiousness” as the root for intellectual virtues like openness to new ideas or courage to stand up for what one takes to be the truth, etc. If epistemic conscientiousness gives rise to (and is also a byproduct of) various specific intellectual virtues, then *taqwā*, which is a stable disposition to do the right thing in all situations, can also give rise to specific virtues. In fact I think that *taqwā* is the root of both moral and intellectual virtues and, indeed, any other types of virtue, such as religious or even physical, etc., that might exist. In other words, *taqwā* is not just “moral conscience” as one might tend to infer from Fazlur Rahman’s remark quoted above. It is a comprehensive conscience covering all ends or values. Whatever a human being desires, they must be regulated by *taqwā* or conscience. It includes desire for truth; for knowledge, understanding and wisdom; for spirituality; for material comforts as well as other physical desires such as food or sexual satisfaction. In the Qur’ānic worldview there are right and wrong ways to fulfill these desires and, hence, conscience/*taqwā* must be exercised. The Qur’ān emphasizes reflection on life situations and sources of guidance in order to live a conscientious life. It says:

Then do they not reflect upon the Qur’ān, or are there locks upon [their] hearts? (47:24)

Although this verse talks about reflection upon the Qur’ān, the principle that humans ought to reflect on all situations is underscored many times elsewhere:

Who remember Allah while standing or sitting or [lying] on their sides and give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying], “Our Lord, You did not create this aimlessly; exalted are You [above such a thing]; then protect us from the punishment of the Fire. (3:191) (Also see 7:176, and 23:68, for other examples)

Reflecting on all aspects of life and on the heavens and the earth and then seeking protection for the pitfall of Fire actually is an exercise of *taqwā* which in its core meaning stands for protecting oneself against possible danger or attack. Such exercise of conscience produces virtues relevant to the attainment of various ends and

values. *Taqwā* is, therefore, this *global* conscience from which arise all local virtues relevant to the proper attainment of different values pertaining to different fields of life.

We must pause and look briefly at the Qur'ānic texts supporting such a global role for *taqwā*. The verse below seems to be asking for *taqwā* in all matters of life:

Say: "Who is it that sustains you (in life) from the sky and from the earth? Or who is it that has power over hearing and sight? And who is it that brings out the living from the dead and the dead from the living? And who is it that rules and regulates all affairs?" They will soon say, "Allah." Say, "will ye not then show piety (to Him)?" (10:31) (Ali 2003)

The basic idea here is that since God sustains and regulates everything, we need to have *taqwā* or piety in relation to Him. But that can only mean that we have to act with *taqwā* in relation to everything, including our powers like hearing and sight as well as reason. It appears, therefore, that even faculties of knowledge must be subject to *taqwā* or conscience. This is in addition to everything else in life that must be dealt with through *taqwā*. But exercising faculties of knowledge with *taqwā* means that these faculties must be exercised in accordance with the requirements of relevant intellectual virtues in different situations. *Taqwā*, therefore, does not have a moral purview only. Exercise of knowledge faculties is also to be regulated by it. As the verse notes, all affairs are regulated by God; humans must show *taqwā* or piety to Him in all affairs. Wherever such piety or *taqwā* is absent, human affairs will go astray. In relation to knowledge faculties, it appears to mean that humans will fail to attain their epistemic ends unless they exercise *taqwā* or piety in the appropriate, i.e., epistemic, sense. Such exercise of *taqwā* can be interpreted only as exercise of intellectual virtue(s) in pursuit of epistemic ends. For example, among other things, exercise of the intellectual virtue of thoroughness would be required in order for our faculties of sight and hearing to take us to right perceptions or observations while conducting an inquiry.

In another verse the Qur'ān says:

Indeed, in the alternation of the night and the day and [in] what Allah has created in the heavens and the earth are signs for a people who fear Allah [have *taqwā*]. (10:6)

Interpretation of the signs of creation requires the use of reason. Here the Qur'ān links the ability to understand the signs in creation with *taqwā*. This means that exercise of reason to understand also falls within the purview of *taqwā* or conscience. But how does conscience function in the process of exercise of reason except through functioning in accordance with intellectual virtues relevant to a given situation? Since the Qur'ān also links *taqwā* with truth, exercise of intellectual *taqwā* or conscience would aim at discovering the truth in a given matter.

O you who have believed, fear Allah [have *taqwā*] and be with those who are true. (9:119).
(Also see 7:169)

Taqwā requires believers to be with those who have truth [in a certain matter], which is the same thing as finding the truth of a matter and being with it. If one has *taqwā*, one will be *motivated* to be with truth. *Taqwā* is, therefore, explicitly linked by the Qur'ān with the epistemic end of truth.

Indeed the Qur'ān is explicit in connecting *taqwā* with economic values as well. It says:

So consume what you have taken of war booty [as being] lawful and good, and fear Allah. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful. (8:69) (Also see 3:130)

The term translated as “fear Allah” is *wattaqullah*, which involves the verb from the root word for *taqwā*. So in relation to economic values attained in war, exercise of *taqwā* is enjoined. The same principle is stated by the Qur'ān in the context of food:

There is not upon those who believe and do righteousness [any] blame concerning what they have eaten [in the past] if they [now] fear Allah and believe and do righteous deeds, and then fear Allah and believe, and then fear Allah and do good; and Allah loves the doers of good. (5:93)

These verses show that *taqwā* is indeed global in its purview, and pursuit of desires for all values and ends must be regulated by relevant virtues arising out of *taqwā*.

If *taqwā* has such a global purview and can be equated with a kind of comprehensive conscience, then we need to address two further issues. First we need to ask about the nature of this comprehensive conscience and the way it relates to some other philosophical views of conscience. Second, if conscience is related as a root to all kinds of virtues, i.e., moral, intellectual, and religious, then what is the nature of the relationship between different types of virtue? Are all virtues species of moral virtues or do they stand independent of moral virtues and each other?

In relation to the first question, it may be noted that Allen Wood (2018) has pointed to three types of philosophical theories of conscience in literature: moral knowledge theories, motivation theories, and reflection theories. As he notes, they are not mutually exclusive and philosophers have taken positions in which they can overlap. However, each type of theory of conscience has a basic focus. Moral knowledge theory focuses on the idea that conscience affords us moral knowledge about right or wrong actions. In motivation theory, conscience provides us with feelings or motives to do the right thing and avoid the wrong one. In reflection theory, conscience is viewed as a source of reflection on moral rectitude of our actual or potential actions. Wood informs us that Kant's theory of conscience is a motivation and reflection theory, while Joseph Butler's theory is a reflection theory of conscience. Let me quote Butler at length to get a good sense of his position:

...[T]here is a superior principle of reflection or conscience in every man, which distinguishes between the internal principles of his heart, as well as his external actions; which passes judgment upon himself and them, pronounces determinately some actions to be in themselves just, right, good, others to be in themselves evil, wrong, unjust: which, without being consulted, without being advised with, magisterially exerts itself, and approves or condemns him the doer of them accordingly: and which, if not forcibly stopped, naturally and always of course goes on to anticipate a higher and more effectual sentence, which shall hereafter second and affirm its own. ... It is by this faculty, natural to man, that he is a moral agent, that he is a law to himself, but this faculty, I say, not to be considered merely as a principle in his heart, which is to have some influence as well as others, but considered as a faculty in kind and in nature supreme over all others, and which bears its own authority of being so. (White 2006, 58)

Butler uses “principle” and “faculty” interchangeably in his text and by the “principle” or “faculty” of conscience, he means the source of virtue.

For both Kant and Butler conscience reflects on the right or wrong of our performed or contemplated actions and is primary in relation to other principles or affects of human nature. As Allen Wood (2018) notes, conscience, for Kant, not only is a “moral feeling” that motivates us to do the right thing but also an inner court for self-examination. It reflects on whether or not our actions are in accord with our duty.

As can be seen from the above quote, Butler holds a reflective view of conscience. He views it as a sense of right and wrong present in all human beings. It plays a governing role in relation to affects as well as other principles of human nature like self-love and benevolence. It reflects on our own or others’ actions in order to judge them right or wrong. Butler takes conscience to be autonomous in the sense of being motivated by itself. It works from within as an inner sense and reflects on all actions and passions as to whether or not they are right/virtuous (1865, 85–86).

It is such a reflective role in relation to all human affects, beliefs, and actions that *taqwā* is supposed to play, as we have seen in our discussion of the relevant Qurʾānic contexts above. If this understanding of *taqwā* is correct, then it looks like a comprehensive conscience that reflects on moral, epistemic, and other aspects of human lives. Its goal is to ensure human *ḥalāl*, which is comprehensive success or happiness in this world and in the Hereafter.¹ This link with success makes the Qurʾānic view of *taqwā* into a general disposition for virtue that aims at comprehensive success or *ḥalāl*, which is moral as well as epistemic and religious. There is a similarity here with what Zagzebsky calls a happiness-based view of virtue (1996, 81).

We turn now to our second question: the nature of the relationship between different types of virtues. Zagzebsky (137–158) has argued that epistemic virtues are not distinct from moral virtues and are, in fact, a species of them. Julia Annas disagrees with Zagzebsky’s position on the ground that the aims of epistemic and moral virtues may not always converge and, indeed, can conflict with each other. She says:

The real distinction emerges when we consider that moral virtue is essentially practical; it is the skill of living, where living, in the virtue tradition, is essentially active, shaping your life so that it is ordered from within. The way you live is seen as actively reflecting and expressing your character and hence your choices. Intellectual virtue, on the other hand is not essentially practical; it is theoretical in that it is directed at achieving aims other than good action. Particularly if we think of intellectual virtue as aimed at achieving truth, we can see that its aim is going to be distinct from that of moral virtue. (Annas 2003, 21)

Similarly Bloomfield argues that it is a mistake to subsume intellectual virtues under moral virtues because “if the virtues are a subset of skills, then the epistemology of skills, moral and otherwise, will be independent of any particular ethical theory; for while all skills have a *logos*, there is nothing especially moral about having one” (2000, 32). While it is true that Zagzebsky does not take virtues to be a

¹For the link between *ḥalāl* and *taqwā*, see Qurʾān 2:189, 3:13, 3:200, and 5:100, among others.

subset of skills, that does not itself prove that intellectual virtues are a subset of moral virtues.

I think, therefore, that given their distinct aims, as noted by Annas, moral and epistemic virtues are not reducible to each other, though in many situations they can intertwine and are closely related. This is a point that Zagzebsky also underscores (1996, 158–165).

It must be added here that Anthony Booth (2016, 8, 66) has emphasized presence of a similar approach about a close relationship between theoretical and practical reason or epistemic and moral ends in the writings of Medieval Muslim philosophers, particularly al-Farabi, Avicenna, Averroes, and al-Ghazali.

A close connection between moral and epistemic values, as discussed above, comes out clearly in the Qur'ānic verses on *taqwā* as well. In the Qur'ānic concept of *taqwā* or reflective conscience, conscientiousness can assume both a moral and an epistemic form, depending on whether the end in view is practical or theoretical.

A word also needs to be added here about the relationship between *taqwā* as a comprehensive disposition or conscience and specific moral or epistemic or other type of virtues. How does the specific virtue of courage, for example, relate to its root *taqwā*? As we have seen, *taqwā* is the acquired and stable general disposition for doing the right thing in all spheres of life in order to achieve comprehensive success. It is a way of conscientious living. When faced with a specific situation of danger, *taqwā* or conscience motivates/requires the moral agent to act according to the relevant virtue of courage. Conscience helps us choose what specific virtue applies in the given situation or field, motivates us to apply it, and finally evaluates our success or failure in doing so. It is a reflective and motivational capacity linked with the ends of our flourishing/comprehensive success as well as truth and understanding. Through reflection on the given situation, it helps us select the right virtue, intellectual or moral. This is the role that conscience or *taqwā* plays.

As noted earlier, *taqwā* starts with humans' natural capacity to distinguish right from wrong. As we grow and move through our transactions with the world, this capacity responds and reacts to different situations in different ways and, as a result, gives birth to specific dispositions to action for different situations. If we make the right choices, we end up acquiring virtues. However, if we violate the dictates of natural conscience, we end up corrupting it and thereby start acquiring dispositions for vice. This is how specific virtues or vices arise as dispositions from the root inclination to distinguish right from wrong in every situation. As we keep acting in specific ways and with specific attitudes to specific situations, these ways and attitudes become our particular virtues or vices for relevant situations. Over time they are inculcated and habituated. Hence, when a situation arises in the future, *taqwā* or conscience triggers and selects the specific right virtue to apply to the given situation. If our conscience has been dulled/corrupted, it may not motivate us to act virtuously; rather we may act viciously in violation of our natural conscience. Our conscience, at the pre-reflective level, is motivated by our ends of flourishing/comprehensive success or truth. But we can habituate ourselves to act in violation of these ends. The root of all virtues is, therefore, *taqwā* or conscience and specific

virtues arise slowly out of this root as specific responses to specific situations get habituated in us.

Different situations of life are related to different ends or values and call for different responses. Hence, a moral virtue comes into play when a situation calls for achieving a moral end or value. Likewise if the situation is epistemic in nature and calls for attainment of an epistemic end or value like true belief or understanding, the relevant epistemic virtue(s) come into play, provided we are acting conscientiously. The same goes for situations calling for attainment of religious end or value.

The key thing, however, is that specific virtues have the same structure as the general virtue of *taqwā*, except that while *taqwā* is foundational and evaluates the outcome, specific virtues are not foundational and do not evaluate the actions, affects, or beliefs resulting from their application. Each specific virtue is an acquired disposition to act in a certain way relevant to the situation at hand to achieve the right value or the best outcome and involves a specific motivational component related to the value aimed at. This motivational component or impulse is based in one's conscience, which wants us do the right thing in that specific situation. However, evaluation of the outcome of application of a specific virtue is the task of the reflective aspect of the conscience and not the virtue that has been applied.

4.3 Additional Epistemic Virtues in the Qur'ān

We mentioned at the beginning of this chapter some important epistemic virtues implied by the Qur'ānic verses that talk about ignorance. There are other epistemic virtues mentioned and advocated by the Qur'ān. Appraising truly is one such virtue, mentioned in the following verse:

They have not appraised Allah with true appraisal, while the earth entirely will be [within] His grip on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens will be folded in His right hand. Exalted is He and high above what they associate with Him. (39:69)

Verses 6:91 and 22:74 also talk about true appraisal in a similar vein. *It is an important intellectual capacity to assess things or beings appropriately and not to either underestimate them or overestimate them.* That is the virtue the Qur'ān seems to emphasize here.

Another important epistemic virtue mentioned in the Qur'ān is that of *intellectual integrity*:

And that He might make evident those who are hypocrites. For it was said to them, “Come, fight in the way of Allah or [at least] defend.” They said, “If we had known [there would be] fighting, we would have followed you.” They were nearer to disbelief that day than to faith, saying with their mouths what was not in their hearts. And Allah is most Knowing of what they conceal. (3:167)

Hypocrites were “saying with their mouths what was not in their hearts.” That means they were not showing intellectual integrity. This idea is present in other verses, such as 2:44, 5:41, 9:8, and 48:11.

Another epistemic virtue mentioned in the Qur'ān relates to *proper use of knowing faculties*. It may be noted that natural knowing faculties like hearing, seeing or reason, etc., are not characterized as virtues anywhere by the Qur'ān. However, it does emphasize our responsibility to use them properly:

And We have certainly created for Hell many of the jinn and mankind. They have hearts with which they do not understand, they have eyes with which they do not see, and they have ears with which they do not hear. Those are like livestock; rather, they are more astray. It is they who are the heedless. (7:179)

More or less the same idea is present in verses 8:22 and 25:44. The point of these verses seems to be that failure to use knowing faculties properly can reduce humans to a level worse than animals. *Proper use of these faculties is, therefore, a responsibility. Hence, acquiring the disposition for a proper use of faculties is to be in a virtuous epistemic state.*

This idea is further reinforced by the Qur'ān by declaring humans accountable in relation to their knowing faculties. It says:

And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed, the hearing, the sight and the heart – about all those [one] will be questioned. (17:36)

What is underscored here is the principle that humans are accountable for the way they use their faculties of knowledge. Proper use of such faculties would be in accordance with the dictates of *taqwā* or conscience. We must be intellectually conscientious in our use of knowing faculties, particularly at the reflective level.

The Qur'ān also underlines the need for an attentive heart in the context of knowledge:

So have they not traveled through the earth and have hearts by which to reason and ears by which to hear? For indeed, it is not eyes that are blinded, but blinded are the hearts which are within the breasts. (22:46)

Other verses such as 18:28 and 50:37 have a similar import. In order to understand, we must keep in view that “heart” is also taken to be a seat of “understanding” by the Qur'ān in certain contexts. It would appear that this verse can be taken to be talking about human failure to understand the meaning and purpose of life in this world. Additionally, however, heart is an obvious seat of emotions. Humans have to bring the right kind of emotional sensitivity (attitudes) to the situations of their lives (as they move through the world) in order to understand those situations properly. Therefore, *an attentive heart or proper affects are also required for understanding things or having knowledge of them*. Epistemic virtues need to be accompanied by certain emotional attitudes as well. This I call the epistemic virtue of an *attentive heart*, because, although it is related to affects, its primary goal is epistemic.

Overall the following picture regarding epistemic virtues seems to emerge from the Qur'ān:

- (A) *Taqwā*: The general acquired stable disposition, based in a natural initial ability to distinguish right from wrong, for doing the right or virtuous thing in relation to all types of ends or values, i.e., moral, intellectual, and religious. It is foun-

dational to all types of virtues and is the root of all specific virtues in all areas. Its corruption or dulling produces vice. It is the Qur'ānic equivalent of a reflective conscience which has a motivational as well as reflective role in triggering and then judging actual or contemplated human actions or beliefs to be right or wrong. All specific moral and epistemic virtues are acquired disposition based in this reflective conscience, making us do the specific right things (or acquire specific true beliefs) in specific situations to produce the best outcome both for the given situations and for living well generally. The goal of *taqwā* is overall comprehensive success or *falāḥ* in the case of both moral and epistemic ends, though in the epistemic sphere this goal is attained through achieving true beliefs and in the moral sphere through right living/action. The goal of each specific virtue is to achieve the best outcome specific to the situation to which the virtue applies. Specific virtues also contribute to the overall goal of *taqwā*.

- (B) While this is not meant to be an exhaustive list, specific epistemic virtues mentioned in the Qur'ān are: Epistemic responsibility of being open to evidence or epistemic conscientiousness; rational capacity to evaluate ideas before adopting them; epistemic fairness; avoidance of epistemic lapse or failure to exercise some relevant epistemic virtue or epistemic vigilance; epistemic humility; fairness in regard to oneself or reasonable self-respect; caring for what is right; responsibility of accepting only trustworthy testimony; knowing the proper extent of one's capacities; rational analysis of ideas; patience to get all the facts right; avoiding prejudice by being open to relevant facts; openness to the truth of revelation; disposition for a true or balanced appraisal of things; intellectual integrity; disposition for a proper use of knowledge-faculties; and virtue of an attentive heart.

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Chapter 5

On Understanding



5.1 Introduction

So far we have been talking about Qur'ānic hints on intellectual virtues in relation to the concept of knowledge, specifically propositional knowledge wherein the object of knowledge as a mental state is a proposition. For example when we say “Tom knows that p ,” what we mean is that Tom’s mental state of knowledge has proposition p as its object. Understanding, however, is apparently a different epistemic state than such propositional knowledge, except where it is understanding of a single proposition (Pritchard 2009, 30–1 and Gordon 2012, 187–8). It is an important epistemic end in our cognitive pursuits and has been mentioned in the Qur’ān. In this chapter we develop the Qur’ānic hints about the nature of understanding in the context of contemporary discussions of this concept by virtue epistemologists.

According to Lane’s Arabic Lexicon, the term *lubbun* means “heart” or “kernel of a nut” (Lane 1863, 2643). This term is also applied to human beings to signify the heart of their being, i.e., *understanding*. The term *dhu lubb* means *possessing understanding* or *being a person of understanding*. Its plural is *ulul albāb*, meaning *persons of understanding*. This expression occurs 16 times in the Qur’ān, according to the Qur’ān Dictionary.¹ Another expression that can mean “understanding” is *fiqhun*, but it is not unique to “understanding” and can also mean “knowledge” (Lane 1863, 2429). In this chapter our basic focus is the Qur’ānic term *ulul albāb* or *persons of understanding*. We’ll also look at *fiqhun* to see where it is used to mean “understanding.”

¹The *Quranic Arabic Corpus* at <http://corpus.quran.com/qurandictionary.jsp?q=lbb>, accessed on June 26, 2018.

5.2 Analysis of the Relevant Verses

The verses of the Qur'ān which talk about some characteristic of “persons of understanding” are as follows: Grasping far-reaching implications of a principle (2:179), referring to having *taqwā* or piety (2:197, 5:100, 65:10), grasping the significance of wisdom (2:269), correctly grasping the message of fundamental and allegorical verses of the Qur'ān (3:7), grasping the meaning of signs in creation (3:190), grasping the lesson of a story (12:111), taking heed from revelation (13:19, 14:52, 38:29, 40:54), taking God's blessings as reminder (38:43), paying heed to the difference between devout and un-devout, knowledgeable and ignorant (39:9), listening to speech and following its best meaning (39:18), taking rain and the cycle of crops' life as a reminder (39:21).

Let us look at each of these verses to obtain a view of understanding presupposed by them. The first verse above is as follows:

And there is for you in legal retribution [saving of] life, O you [people] of understanding, that you may become righteous. (2:179)

The Qur'ān here is talking about the legal principle of equal retribution. This principle is said to have the deeper implication of giving “life” to a society. If people did not receive punishment equivalent to their crimes, society would soon collapse. People would have no reason to abide by the law and be morally righteous. The life of a society and its righteousness, therefore, depend on this principle. People of understanding grasp this deeper meaning.

What is the epistemic nature of this way of grasping the deeper meanings? How is it different from knowing a proposition? Obviously the principle of legal retribution can be stated as a proposition and can be known as a principle by an epistemic agent under the right circumstances. But only those who pay attention to its various implications may grasp its deeper meanings. Such grasping of the implications is a kind of an *insight* that one may have without explicitly working out the implications. Such an insight need not always be like propositional knowledge, particularly when the implications under question pertain to spiritual, aesthetic or moral values. *The key point is that understanding is taken by the Qur'ān in this verse to be a kind of an insight into deeper aspects of a principle.* It may be translatable into propositional knowledge in certain circumstances but it need not always be so translatable.

Next we have a group of three verses where persons of understanding are said to have *taqwā* or righteousness. These are as follows:

Hajj is [during] well-known months, so whoever has made Hajj obligatory upon himself therein [by entering the state of *iúram*], there is [to be for him] no sexual relations and no disobedience and no disputing during Hajj. And whatever good you do – Allah knows it. And take provisions, but indeed, the best provision is fear of Allah. And fear Me, O you of understanding. (2:197)

Say, “Not equal are the evil and the good, although the abundance of evil might impress you.” So fear Allah, O you of understanding, that you may be successful. (5:100)

Allah has prepared for them a severe punishment; so fear Allah, O you of understanding who have believed. Allah has sent down to you the Qur'an. (65:10)

In these verses the term translated as “fear of Allah” is *taqwā*, as we saw in the previous chapter, is one of the most comprehensive religio-moral and epistemic terms in the Qur'an. Basically it refers to a comprehensive conscience, i.e., the ability of a human being to distinguish between right and wrong in all matters in order to do what is right and his/her realization that the ultimate criterion of judgment on human actions is with God, not human beings.

These three verses link *taqwā* with the epistemic state of “understanding.” Verse 5:100 seems to be the central verse. It basically says that good and evil cannot be equivalent and, hence, persons of understanding must fully realize this. Having *taqwā* is a characteristic of the people of understanding. The verse seems to be saying that since good and evil are not equivalent, persons of understanding show *taqwā* or, in other words, distinguish between the two clearly and act upon what is right or good. Here the Qur'an seems to be talking about conscience as it applies to moral ends. It points to a link between understanding and moral conscientiousness. Understanding is required to grasp the distinction between good and evil. *It appears to facilitate moral conscientiousness.*

Being in such an epistemic state of understanding which facilitates having a conscience of this nature does not seem akin to having knowledge of a single proposition. Such understanding is an overall understanding of life contributing to the *disposition* of a human being, his/her *taqwā*, to act righteously. In other words, it seems that here the Qur'an equates, or at least links, understanding with moral aspect of conscience or *taqwā*. It is not a matter of knowing a single proposition but of reaching a mental state on every occasion that contributes to and facilitates righteous action.

The next verse touching on the matter is 2:269. It translates as follows:

He gives wisdom to whom He wills, and whoever has been given wisdom has certainly been given much good. And none will remember except those of understanding.

The point of this verse is that none will grasp the significance of wisdom except those with understanding. We discuss the Qur'anic concept of wisdom in Chap. 7 but suffice it to say here that it is called *khair un kathirah* or abundant good in this verse and is very important in the epistemological scheme of the Qur'an. It has tremendous significance for human life. Here the Qur'an states that only people of understanding grasp this significance of wisdom. Wisdom is not the same thing as knowing propositions, although sometimes that might be part of it. Wisdom is a comprehensive grasp on all aspects of a situation combined with doing the right thing. As argued by Jason Baehr, it could be understood either as a cognitive state or as cognitive faculty, or even as an intellectual character trait (Baehr 2014, 305). In the first case it is “theoretical wisdom” defined as “deep explanatory understanding” of “epistemically significant subject matters” (311); in the second, trained “theoretical reason” (313–14); and in the third, it is what Baehr calls “a kind of a meta- or master-intellectual” virtue (315). It is in its third sense that it is taken by Russell to involve a certain harmony in one's knowledge, feelings, and will (Russell 2009,

370). If we work with this concept of wisdom, in any one of the three senses underscored by Baehr, then it appears that, according to the above verse, significance of wisdom as a cognitive state or as theoretical reason or as a meta-virtue can be appreciated and grasped only by people of understanding. In other words, the Qur'ān links understanding and wisdom. Understanding is required for appreciating the significance of wisdom. The point of the verse in relation to the concept of understanding seems to be as follows:

Understanding is what is involved in appreciating or grasping the significance of wisdom for human life.

This role of understanding, once again, is not a matter of knowledge of a given set of propositions. Wisdom is “abundant good” because it produces an overall wholesome effect on the life of its possessor. Grasping the significance of such a wholesome effect on a life is not a matter of knowing a few propositions only. It goes to the very core of being able to see what is a wholesome or good life overall. *So understanding here again is not equated with propositional knowledge, though it might involve some such knowledge, and is taken as related to an overall grasp of what a wholesome and good life happens to be.* Once again the Qur'ān seems to link understanding with an overall “good” in life. As we saw above in the case of *taqwā*, understanding is linked with and required for our sense of right and wrong. Likewise it is linked with and required for appreciation of wisdom.

The next verse on our list is 3:7, which pertains to correctly grasping the meaning of “fundamental” and “allegorical” verses of the Qur'ān. It says:

He it is Who has sent down to thee the Book: In it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning); they are the foundation of the Book: others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings, but no one knows its hidden meanings except Allah. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: “We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord” and none will grasp the Message except men of understanding.

The idea here is that the allegorical verses of the Qur'ān can lend themselves to different interpretations and no one can claim to know the ultimate truth about them. In such a situation, trying to use differences of interpretations as a basis for discord shows lack of proper grounding in [relevant] knowledge. With proper grounding in knowledge, one can see that his/her interpretation, or any given interpretation of an allegorical verse for that matter, is just one possible interpretation and, hence, cannot be used as the last word on the matter. Taking one's interpretation as ultimate can lead to discord. A more flexible approach of tolerance of differences of interpretation is closer to being reasonable in such a situation. According to the Qur'ān, people of understanding take a more holistic approach to the Book and avoid insisting on finality of a single interpretation of allegorical verses. *So, a holistic approach, combined with tolerance of different interpretations of allegorical verses,* is noted here by the Qur'ān as a mark of understanding.

Next we come to verse 3:190, which talks about grasping the meaning of signs in creation. A related idea is found in verse 39:21. These verses translate as follows:

Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding. (3:190)

Do you not see that Allah sends down rain from the sky and makes it flow as springs [and rivers] in the earth; then He produces thereby crops of varying colors; then they dry and you see them turned yellow; then He makes them [scattered] debris. Indeed in that is a reminder for those of understanding. (39:21)

Understanding here is associated with being able to see the signs of God in his creation. *Looking at natural phenomena, and, interpreting them as pointing toward God as their creator, is a matter of seeing deeper meanings and purpose in Nature.* Seeing such meaning and purpose involves a special aptitude or disposition to see things in a certain light. *The Qur'an links such aptitude and disposition with having understanding.*

Next, the Qur'an says in verse 12:111 that grasping the lesson of a story is a matter of understanding. The verse reads:

There was certainly in their stories a lesson for those of understanding. Never was the Qur'an a narration invented, but a confirmation of what was before it and a detailed explanation of all things and guidance and mercy for a people who believe.

Grasping the overall lesson of a story or many stories is not a matter of knowing some proposition or other in a given set of stories. It is an overall grasp of the moral. It involves seeing the connections between different parts of a story and then inferring a lesson or moral from the connected whole. *The Qur'an here links understanding with seeing such connections and drawing a moral from the connected whole or the story.*

Next the Qur'an talks about understanding in relation to the idea of taking heed from revelation. The following verses fall in this group:

Is he who knoweth that what is revealed unto thee from thy Lord is the truth like him who is blind? But only men of understanding heed. (13:19) (Pickthall's translation)

This is a clear message for mankind in order that they may be warned thereby, and that they may know that He is only One Allah, and that men of understanding may take heed. (14:52) (Pickthall's translation)

[This is] a blessed Book which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], that they might reflect upon its verses and that those of understanding would be reminded. (38:29)

As guidance and a reminder for those of understanding. (40:54)

The general idea in these verses seems to be that people of understanding reflect on and take heed from the message of revelation. Revelation presents a comprehensive outlook on life and reality grounded in God as its sole creator. Grasping the moral and religious significance of such an outlook for one's life is like grasping a whole system of ideas and values with their interrelations and implications. This ability is the ability of understanding. Once again, therefore, *understanding turns out to be a matter of reflecting over an entire system of ideas and values and grasping their interrelations.*

The next verse relates understanding with human ability to take God's blessings as a reminder of God. It says:

We gave him back his family and doubled their number as a blessing from Us and as a reminder to the people of understanding. (38:43) (Sarwar's translation)

Here the Qur'ān is talking about God's blessings on the Prophet Ayub, who was bestowed with family and other blessings after an excruciating trial. The Qur'ān notes that such blessings of God (after trials) are a reminder of God's power and mercy for those who have understanding. In other words, men of understanding grasp the underlying moral and spiritual meanings of such blessings and trials. *The idea is that worldly blessings and trials have a higher dimension and only men of understanding can see this higher dimension. This seems similar to seeing God's signs in creation mentioned above.*

Next, verse 39:9 talks about people of understanding as those who see the difference between devout and un-devout as well as knowledgeable and ignorant. It reads as follows:

Is one who is devoutly obedient during periods of the night, prostrating and standing [in prayer], fearing the Hereafter and hoping for the mercy of his Lord, [like one who does not]? Say, "Are those who know equal to those who do not know?" Only they will remember [who are] people of understanding.

The Qur'ān is pointing out that only people of understanding grasp the difference between the devout and un-devout or knowledgeable and ignorant. Now grasping such a difference is actually grasping the differences in lives based on devoutness and knowledge on the one hand and un-devoutness and ignorance on the other. *Such a grasp is not a matter of knowing some propositions but involves a comprehensive understanding of two different ways of life. That is why it is linked by the Qur'ān with understanding rather than with knowledge of an idea or proposition.*

Finally, in verse 39:18, the Qur'ān links listening to speech and following its best meaning to people of understanding. The verse translates as follows:

Who listen to speech and follow the best of it. Those are the ones Allah has guided, and those are people of understanding.

This is a very important verse as regards the nature of understanding. Listening to speech properly and then following its best meaning is a sign of people of understanding. People of understanding have a specific attitude when it comes to listening. They follow the best meaning of what is being said. Having this attitude is not simply a matter of comprehending speech in any way possible but involves comprehending its best possible interpretation. In other words, people of understanding have the ability to see the best possible interpretation of speech and then follow it in their responses and actions.

Comprehending the best meanings of speech and following it involves at least three things: *comprehending per se, comprehending the best of the interpretations, and following the best possible meanings. If these three things are a mark of understanding, then understanding is a matter of grasping the best in the meanings of a language as it is used in speech. Such understanding is obviously not a matter of knowing a proposition or a set thereof. It is a matter of mastery of a language plus following the best of its meaning in different situations.*

As noted in the introduction of this chapter, *fiqhun* is another term that can mean "understanding" in certain contexts. Some of the more relevant contexts of the use

of its variants for discussion here are as follows: Understand a statement (4:78); diversification of signs to make people understand (6:65); we have detailed the signs for people who understand (6:98); they have hearts with which they do not understand, they have eyes with which they do not see ... (7:179); steadfastness is related with understanding (8:65); failure to accept revelation shows lack of understanding (9:127); understanding is involved in comprehension of others' speech (18:93, 20:28); fearing humans more than God shows lack of understanding (59:13); hypocrisy involves lack of understanding (63:7); mastering the concepts of religion is a matter of understanding (9:122).

However, these contexts do not seem to add anything new to the functions of understanding that emerge from an analysis (undertaken above) of all the Qur'ānic contexts involving the term *ulul albab*. Therefore, we do not here carry out further elaboration of these verses.

5.3 Overall Concept

Preliminary analysis of all the relevant verses brings us to a rather composite Qur'ānic concept of understanding. It seems to function in the following ways at least: *An insight into deeper aspects of a principle, a kind of a cognitive state that contributes to or facilitates our special ability or disposition to distinguish right from wrong in all situations, cognitive state or ability to grasp the significance of wisdom for human life, special aptitude or disposition to seeing natural phenomena as pointing toward God or deeper meaning, ability to see a story as a connected whole and draw a moral/lesson from it, comprehending an entire system of ideas and values and grasping their interrelations, seeing a higher dimension to worldly blessings or trials, comprehensively grasping the difference between two different ways of life, and mastery of a language and following the best of its meaning in different situations.*

Three basic ideas emerge from these functions of understanding mentioned in the Qur'ān: understanding is gained by grasping the deeper logical or interpretive implications of principles or phenomena or stories; understanding is involved in grasping the ethical and the wiser course; understanding is involved with mastery of a language. All three functions presuppose grasp of interrelations between parts and wholes. In addition it can be seen from these contexts that the Qur'ān sometimes refers to understanding as an ability or disposition and sometimes as the cognitive state attained as a result of the exercise of such an ability or disposition.

The Qur'ān does not deny that one can have understanding of a single statement. In fact verse 4:78, mentioned above in connection with the term *fiqhun*, explicitly mentions this role of understanding. But, as noted earlier, such understanding of a single statement is not normally distinguished from *knowledge* of a proposition by contemporary epistemologists and, hence, we also treat it here as a form of propositional knowledge. But the other three functions of understanding *clearly* separate

it from propositional knowledge and that shows that the Qur'ān takes these two states as distinct from each other.

5.4 Epistemic State of Understanding in Contemporary Epistemology

A number of leading contemporary epistemologists have started paying attention to the epistemic state of understanding instead of just continuing the focus on propositional knowledge. Jonathan Kvanvig, Linda Zagzebsky, Duncan Pritchard, Stephen R. Grimm, John Greco, and others have recently explored understanding as an epistemic state. Generally there are three types of understanding that some of these epistemologists talk about, i.e., propositional understanding, objectual understanding, and wh-understanding or atomistic understanding (for example, Kvanvig 2003, 189; 2009a, 96). Propositional understanding is where the object of understanding is a proposition or referent of that-clause. For example, “Neil understands that X” or “Neil understands that the school closes at 4:00 p.m.”

Objectual understanding has an object as its target that could be a subject matter and it can be holistic in nature. When we say: “John understands bioethics,” we are talking about objectual understanding. Lastly, atomistic understanding is concerned with understanding the “why” of a situation, for example, “Ruth knows why the school was closed.”

As far as propositional understanding is concerned, we have noted earlier that it cannot be generally distinguished from propositional knowledge. Hence, basically we have two types of understanding that are considered as paradigmatic by recent epistemologists: atomistic and objectual or holistic. Pritchard takes atomistic understanding to be the basic paradigm while Kvanvig, Zagzebsky, and Greco take holistic understanding. Let us look at their views.

5.5 Linda Zagzebsky's View

Understanding is a form of knowledge, according to some philosophers, says Zagzebsky (2009, 142), but she wants to point to a kind of understanding that is non-propositional in character, like understanding gained from a map or a graph. Such an understanding is not the same as understanding a set of propositions. She then adds various points that come out of Plato's epistemology and that distinguish understanding from propositional knowledge. She equates understanding with mastery of an art, a skill, or *technê* (2009, 2012). The person who has mastered the *technê* understands the product of the *technê*, can explain this product to others, and also knows the “good” aimed at by the *technê* she has mastered. Understanding of this “good” is common between practitioners of all different *technai* insofar as they

all need to understand the good aimed at by each of their arts or skills or expertise. For example, a physician who understands medicine is someone who has mastered the art of medicine, can explain it to others, and understands the relevant good that her art produces, i.e., good health.

This kind of mastery of a *techne* is not simply a matter of cognition. It includes *doing* things or “practical activities.” Hence, understanding for Plato is not “wholly cognitive” (2012, 358). A very complex mode of reasoning is involved in achieving understanding.

Zagzebsky emphasizes that understanding involves grasping of relations between parts or between parts and a whole. These relations could be spatial, temporal, or causal—what Stephan Grimm characterizes as “dependence” (Grimm 2010, 341). A grasp on such relations enables the person concerned to provide explanations of the products of the *techne* mastered by her. While Grimm (2014) takes understanding to be the knowledge of causes or grasp of dependency relations, Zagzebsky adds that “one’s mental representations of the relations one grasps can be mediated by maps, graphs, diagrams, and three-dimensional models in addition to, or even in place of, the acceptance of a series of propositions” (Zagzebsky 2009, 145). This goes to show, in her opinion, the non-propositional character of understanding.

To these points from Plato she adds one of her own that similarly distinguishes understanding from propositional knowledge. Zagzebsky argues that while we can, under the right conditions, have propositional knowledge by testimony, we cannot have understanding by testimony. Understanding cannot be conveyed to another person. It is not a matter of conveying the right belief as we do in the case of testimonial knowledge (141–5).

Zagzebsky makes a number of other important points regarding the relationship and differences between understanding and knowledge. “Understanding deepens our cognitive grasp of that which is already known.” We can know propositions in a “body of knowledge” without having an understanding of how they “fit together.” Once we grasp this “fitting together,” we understand the body of knowledge. But grasping this fitting together is non-propositional in character (Zagzebsky 2012, 362).

She also says that equally good competing theories can represent “the same portion of reality.” What she apparently means is that such representations, though logically incompatible with each other, live up to the same supporting evidence. Her claim is that such representations can give us understanding of a subject matter or a part of reality though they cannot constitute knowledge. The reason, it appears, would be that incompatible sets of representations cannot be true and knowledge requires truth (362–3).

Zagzebsky also agrees with Catherine Elgin (Elgin 1996, 123) that sometimes truth is not conducive to producing understanding of a subject matter. For example, various scientific laws are not exact truths. They are approximations to truth but produce understanding of their subject matter in us. We say that bodies fall to the Earth at the rate of 32 ft/sec squared in a vacuum. This ignores the gravitational pull of all things other than the Earth. It is not a true statement and, hence, cannot be part of the cognitive state of knowledge. But it does produce understanding of the subject

matter in us. Indeed, if the true formula was to be stated, it would make matters very difficult for us to understand. This also underscores a basic difference between understanding and knowledge (Zagzebsky 2012, 363).

Zagzebsky goes on to add that understanding aims at “comprehensiveness” rather than “exactness.” It “is achieved partly by simplifying what is understood, highlighting certain features and ignoring others. This process compensates for our cognitive limitations” (363). Knowledge and understanding are not always aiming at the same thing, but that does not, concludes Zagzebsky, make understanding any less significant.

This way of looking at understanding obviously makes it non-factive. Truth is not necessary for understanding in some situations. However, Zagzebsky takes understanding to be transparent in the sense that if one understands X, one thereby also realizes that one understands X. There is no difference between *seeming* to understand X and *really* understanding X at the first-order level. In her own words: “... [It] is a state that is constituted by a type of conscious transparency. It may be possible to know without knowing that one knows, but it is impossible without understanding that one understands. ... [T]his does not eliminate every form of skepticism. Skepticism can appear at the second-order level” (365–6). Her overall point here is that understanding is not marred by skepticism and the epistemic agent has a direct (internalist) access to her state of understanding.

It appears, therefore, when Zagzebsky says that understanding might be a form of knowledge, she appears to be talking about propositional understanding. She distinguishes propositional understanding from non-propositional understanding, and takes mastery of an art and grasping of dependency relations, etc., as involving non-propositional understanding. This latter type of understanding fits the characterizations of objectual or holistic understanding in literature. We can take Zagzebsky to be clearly distinguishing between knowledge and non-propositional understanding.

5.6 Jonathan Kvanvig’s View

Kvanvig is primarily interested in objectual/holistic understanding, although he does distinguish three types for theoretical purposes: propositional understanding that uses a *that*-clause, *wh*-understanding that answers why, when, where, or what questions, and objectual understanding that aims at understanding an object or a subject matter. He is willing to ignore understanding-how or understanding of skills in the context of theoretical considerations about understanding, just as epistemologists generally ignore knowledge-how or knowledge of skills in theory of knowledge (Kvanvig 2003, 189–90).

But he also thinks that answers to why, when, etc., questions can be understood in terms of propositional understanding and does not insist upon a separate treatment of these two type of understanding. Therefore, since propositional understanding is not distinct from propositional knowledge, Kvanvig is primarily focused on

objectual understanding, as far as drawing a distinction between knowledge and understanding goes (189). Regarding objectual understanding he says:

To understand is to grasp the variety of such connections. It involves seeing explanatory connections, being aware of the probabilistic interrelationships, and apprehending the logical implications of the information in question. There is, of course, an element of factivity to the notion of understanding, just as there is with the notion of knowledge. But when we move past the alethic aspect of both notions, our attention turns to diverse paths. When the question is whether one knows, the issues that are foremost in our minds are issues about evidence, reliability, reasons for belief, and, perhaps most importantly, non-accidentality regarding the connection between our grounds for belief and the truth of the belief. When the question is whether one has understanding, the issues that are foremost in our minds are issues about the extent of our grasp of the structural relationships (e.g., logical, probabilistic, and explanatory relationships) between the central items of information regarding which the question of understanding arises. (2009a, 96–7)

This is Kvanvig's view of what he calls objectual understanding. What Pritchard (discussed below) refers to as "atomistic understanding" seems to be Kvanvig's wh-understanding (96). The difference between objectual and wh-understanding is that the latter focuses on a single wh-question while the former can have a whole subject matter as its object and aims at understanding the whole by grasping structural connections between its parts.

Kvanvig does not deny factivity to objectual understanding but thinks that such understanding need not be totally factive. His idea is that while understanding generally implies truth of what is understood, it can be attributed in situations where the epistemic agent is not completely right in all her information about the subject matter. He says:

[I]t is hard to resist the view that understanding may be correctly ascribed even in the presence of some false beliefs concerning a subject matter. For example, suppose the false beliefs concern matters that are peripheral rather than central to the subject matter in question. We might want to talk of slight imperfections in understanding or of slightly defective understanding, but that is different from saying that there is no understanding present at all because of the falsehoods involved.

The view I am defending needs to be altered slightly to accommodate this idea, but it need not be abandoned entirely. When the falsehoods are peripheral, we can ascribe understanding based on the rest of the information grasped that is true and contains no falsehoods. In such a case, the false beliefs are not part of the understanding the person has, even though they concern the very material regarding which the person has understanding. So in this way, the factive character of understanding can be preserved without having to say that a person with false beliefs about a subject matter can have no understanding of it. (2003, 201–2)

This way of looking at understanding makes understanding basically factive because falsehoods are peripheral and Kvanvig says they are not a part of a person's understanding of the concerned material. Elsewhere he calls this view of understanding quasi-factive (2009b, 343).

5.7 Duncan Pritchard's View

Pritchard, while considering whether knowledge or understanding is distinctively valuable, criticizes both Zagzebsky and Kvanvig for their takes on understanding and believes atomistic understanding to be the primary or paradigmatic form. For example, about Zagzebsky's position he says:

So the transparency and non-factivity claims that Zagzebsky offers are false. It is difficult to diagnose why Zagzebsky made this mistake. Part of the reason may be that there is a failure to be clear about the type of understanding under consideration. After all, when it comes to the kind of holistic understanding that applies to a subject matter, this plausibly *is* compatible with at least *some* false beliefs about that subject matter, but this sort of understanding is precisely not the sort at issue. Moreover, it would seem that the analogue of Zagzebsky's non-factivity claim as regards understanding when it comes to holistic understanding would be that such understanding can be possessed even though one has *no* relevant true beliefs, and that is surely implausible (Pritchard et al. 2010, 76).

The sort of understanding that Pritchard seems to be taking as primary is *wh-*understanding or what he calls atomistic understanding. He considers such understanding to be non-transparent, factive, and immune to epistemic luck of the environmental variety, though not Gettier-style epistemic luck.² He contrasts his position with Zagzebsky and Kvanvig in this regard. Zagzebsky, as we saw above, takes understanding to be transparent and non-factive and immune to epistemic luck. Kvanvig, on the other hand, takes understanding to be non-transparent, quasi-factive, and immune to epistemic luck (Kvanvig 2003, 197–99). He also allows that understanding, unlike knowledge, admits of degrees, meaning that while knowledge (of a proposition, for example) is either an all or nothing affair, understanding (of an art, for example) can be of various degrees.

In Pritchard's view, factivity of understanding entails that, in genuinely understanding something, one attains true relevant beliefs about it. For understanding to be transparent means that there is no distinction between seemingly understanding something and really understanding it. Immunity to epistemic luck means that understanding is not produced by some accidental factors but results from the abilities of the epistemic agent. Pritchard brings out a distinction between two types of epistemic luck: Gettier-style luck and environmental luck. Gettier-style luck can intervene between the ability of an agent to know or understand and the success of that agent in reaching true belief. Take the now common sheep-dog example from epistemology literature. An agent is looking at a field and sees a sheep in the distance. In reality, however, she is looking at a rock structure that looks like a sheep. She forms the belief that there is a sheep in the field. Unbeknownst to her there is a sheep in the field behind the rock structure. Her belief is correct though gettierized in the sense that it is true accidentally and not because of her ability. Hence, she fails to have knowledge of the matter. This is Gettier-style luck. Pritchard argues that understanding, like knowledge, is not immune to this type of luck.

²The distinction between two types of luck is explained a few lines below.

Next, imagine an artist who has carved sheep out of several rocks in the field. They look like real sheep from where the agent is standing. In the middle of these statues, there is a real sheep grazing in the field. The agent looks toward the field and sees a sheep. By sheer luck her eyes fall on the real sheep and she attains the belief that there is a sheep in the field. Her belief is true and it is true also because of her ability to perceive. Pritchard argues that this type of environmental luck is not compatible with knowledge. The agent in question does not have the knowledge that there is a sheep in the field because she might as well have cast her glance on a sheep statue. It is sheer accident that she has succeeded in reaching true belief.

However, Pritchard argues that this type of environmental luck is compatible with atomistic understanding. He explains the point through the following example: Suppose I ask a fire officer why my house was burning. She tells me that it was because of faulty wiring. This makes me understand why my house burned. Now suppose further that, by chance, there were some people dressed as fire officers going to a nearby fancy dress party. It was just by sheer luck that I hit upon the real officer in that environment. Do I still understand why my house burned? Pritchard says, yes. This type of environmental luck does not undermine my understanding as to why my house burned. If faulty wiring was the real cause, then I still understand why my house burned. The point is that environmental luck undermines knowledge but it cannot undermine understanding. This goes to show that there is a distinction between the two (Pritchard et al. 2010: 78–9).

There seem to be some differences in the outlook of these epistemologists. However, these differences are not crucial and in some cases are only apparent. Zagzebsky is equally interested in objectual and practical understanding whereas Kvanvig is focused only on objectual understanding and does not go into a consideration of understanding-how. Their views on factivity of understanding are also broadly similar. Both allow that understanding may be attained even in the presence of some false beliefs. Kvanvig does not take understanding to be transparent and that might look like a big difference from Zagzebsky. However, when we look carefully at Zagzebsky's position on the transparency of understanding, she allows it only at the first-order level (Zagzebsky 2012, 365–6). That means that such transparency can break down at the second-order level. It might appear to me that I understand a certain theory, for example, and such appearance will not be distinct from “really understanding” the said theory as long as I do not start evaluating this appearance of understanding. As soon as I start evaluating it, I move to the second level and doubts can start arising as to whether or not the appearance of understanding was real understanding. If this is a correct interpretation of Zagzebsky's position outlined above, then she is not claiming understanding to be transparent beyond the first level. Such a view only underlines the idea that whenever one understands, one is aware that one understands, although one might turn out to be mistaken after evaluation. She wants to contrast this feature of understanding with knowledge. Her view, as noted above, is that it may be possible to know without being aware that one knows.

It should also be added that some of the differences between Pritchard, Kvanvig, and Zagzebsky appear partly larger than they are because of the types of

understanding they focus on. As we have seen, Pritchard is primarily concerned with atomistic understanding while Kvanvig (exclusively) and Zagzebsky (to a large extent) are concerned with objectual understanding. Atomistic understanding is the understanding we gain when we get an answer to our why, what, where type of questions. For example, when I ask: "Why did Rabia leave the party early?" and someone responds: "She was not feeling well," I gain an understanding of Rabia's action. This type of understanding cannot be non-factive. If it is false that Rabia was not feeling well, then I cannot be claimed to have an understanding of why she left the party early. But holistic/objectual understanding is a different matter. One can claim to understand bioethics, for example, even when some of her peripheral beliefs about the subject matter are false.

Pritchard's position regarding immunity of understanding to epistemic luck is also different than that of Kvanvig. Kvanvig takes objectual understanding to be immune to Gettier-style luck to distinguish it from knowledge in this regard. Pritchard does not agree. As noted above, understanding is immune only to environmental luck and not to Gettier-style luck for him. He says:

So while Kvanvig and others are right to think that understanding is compatible with a certain type of knowledge-undermining epistemic luck, they are wrong to think that it is compatible with all types of knowledge-undermining epistemic luck. Their mistake, it seems, is to fail to distinguish between two crucial ways in which epistemic luck can be knowledge-undermining. That understanding is compatible with one type of knowledge-undermining epistemic luck suffices, however, to show that knowledge is distinct from understanding, since it entails that one can have understanding without the associated knowledge. (Pritchard et al. 2010, 80)

But this difference between the two authors does not seem to emanate from the type of understanding they are talking about. Both atomistic and objectual understanding seem to be immune only to environmental epistemic luck and not Gettier-style epistemic luck. Take Pritchard's example again. Let us assume that my house burned and faulty wiring was the actual cause. In a case of atomistic understanding, I can be claimed to understand why my house burned if, by sheer accident, faulty wiring is cited to me as a cause by a genuine fire officer walking around in a crowd of masqueraders in the vicinity of my house. But I can claim to have an objectual understanding in a similar situation. Take Kvanvig's Comanche example. Even if I gain my understanding of why the Comanche dominated the southern plains of North America from the late seventeenth to the late nineteenth century from a scholarly book selected by sheer luck from among a host of only superficially scholarly-looking books on the subject, I will have the understanding of the historical process in question. Both types of understanding seem compatible with environmental epistemic luck. However, if we now change the examples into instances of Gettier-style luck which intervenes between fact and belief, the situation changes. If a fake fire officer tells me that my house is burning because of faulty wiring, even if she is accidentally right, I cannot be said to have an understanding of why my house is on fire because my source is unreliable. Similarly if I consult a superficial scholarly-looking book which is only accidentally right about its beliefs about the Comanche, I will not thereby gain understanding as to why the tribe dominated the southern

plains in a particular historical period. Again this would be because of the unreliability of my source.

Zagzebsky, Kvanvig, Pritchard, and other epistemologists³ take knowledge and understanding to be distinct as epistemic states. Yet other epistemologists, for example John Greco and Stephan Grimm, agree with the standard view in philosophy of science, and argue that understanding is just a species of knowledge.⁴ Here we'll only touch upon Greco's position to get a flavor of this view.

Greco calls his view of understanding neo-Aristotelian and characterizes it in terms of knowledge of "dependence relations" between different parts of a system. Such a system can be a system of "real" relations in the world, or a theory or model representing a portion of the real world, or the relations between representation and the real world. He sums up his position as follows:

...[U]nderstanding consists in a systematic knowledge of dependence relations, where dependence relations can be of various sorts, including "real" relations between parts of the world, conceptual and logical relations between parts of a theory, and semantic relations between theory and world. Our neo-Aristotelian account also explains why scientific explanation is only one kind of explanation, and it locates scientific understanding within a unified account of understanding in general. (2014, 293)

Greco's point is that Aristotle's view of causality is actually a way of identifying various forms of dependence relations between objects, events, and processes, etc. To Aristotle's four causes, he adds other dependence relations such as part-whole relations, logical, mathematical, conceptual, and supervenience relations. Understanding a thing or event, under this view, consists in having the knowledge of its "location" in the relevant network of such dependence relations.

As the above quote shows, Greco emphasizes that knowledge of dependence relations has to be systematic in order for understanding to be achieved. The way the relations *cohere* with each other or the way they *fit* each other needs to be known before one can achieve understanding. That is why understanding cannot be "isolated or episodic" and can come in degrees (293).

Greco also explains the value of understanding as an epistemic state in terms of its systematic nature. He says that since understanding is a kind of knowledge, it inherits the value of knowledge. In addition it is valuable because it "involves a system of knowledge rather than mere episodic knowledge" (293–4).

Given this view of understanding as a systematic kind of knowledge, Greco also concludes, contra Kvanvig in particular, that understanding is factive and not immune to Gettier-style luck (397–300).

³ See Catherine Elgin (2007) and Wayne Riggs (2003), for example.

⁴ See Philip Kitcher (2002) and Peter Lipton (2009), for example.

5.8 The Qur'ānic View Again

From these basics of contemporary discussion of the epistemic state of understanding, it emerges that understanding can be either propositional or objectual/holistic or atomistic. Since propositional understanding is not normally distinguished from propositional knowledge by epistemologists, we are left with objectual and atomistic states of understanding. It appears that these two types of understanding are both important in our lives. We are often in need of an answer to a why, what, or where question, and the answer to our question does give us an understanding (atomistic type) of the relevant situation. As in the case of Pritchard's question in the example – “why did my house burn?” – the answer “it was due to faulty wiring” does give the owner an understanding of the situation. Similarly, we gain objectual or holistic understanding of bioethics after taking courses with an expert. In such a situation we become capable of grasping interrelations between different parts of the discipline, i.e., the way some parts are related to the others, the way they make up a whole, the way some parts explain or logically imply others, etc. Indeed such a holistic understanding may, on occasion, make it possible for us to answer other people's wh-questions of the type that Pritchard associates with atomistic understanding. Hence, it appears that atomistic and objectual understanding states are related with each other and atomistic understanding might be parasitic on objectual understanding.

Given this relationship between objectual and atomistic understanding, we can conclude that the three functions of understanding involved in the Qur'ānic verses discussed above can come into play at both objectual and atomistic levels. Understanding for the Qur'ān is primarily either propositional (and not distinct from propositional knowledge) or it is objectual, in which case it can also answer wh-questions that Pritchard mentions as the province of atomistic understanding. Since propositional knowledge has been touched upon in the previous chapters, we, therefore, need to look into what the Qur'ān takes to be the nature of objectual understanding.

We can begin by trying to answer this question by looking into what the Qur'ānic view of objectual understanding implies for its factivity, transparency, and immunity to luck.

It seems clear that grasping the deeper logical or interpretive implications of a principle or phenomena or story can involve many, and sometimes complex, relations between a principle and its implications of various types or between a phenomenon and its possible interpretations of various sorts or a story and its implications from multiple angles. As a result, we cannot expect an epistemic agent to be right in all her beliefs while grasping such relations. Some of her beliefs about the scientific interpretation of an observed phenomenon, for example, might be false. In such a situation, if a majority of her beliefs are correct, we can attribute understanding of the phenomenon to her. The same would go for a principle and its various implications as well as a story and its implications. A comprehensive grasp on a whole lot of the relevant relations plus a majority of true beliefs about them is

enough to attribute understanding. As Kvanvig argues, understanding would be sort of quasi-factive in such a situation and also vague as to how many of the relevant beliefs about relations will have to be true before understanding can be correctly attributed (see Kvanvig 2009b). Therefore, the kind of understanding presupposed by the grasp of logical or interpretive implications of principles, phenomena, or stories can be taken to be quasi-factive only because of the very complex set of relations involved.

Let us turn now to the understanding that is involved with grasping the ethical and the wiser course in life. Here again it appears that a person who makes the right ethical judgment in the majority of cases but makes a few ethical mistakes here and there cannot be said to be devoid of moral understanding. The same would seem to apply to selection of what is the wise thing to do for a person in a given situation or over a range of situations. A person may make a few mistakes because of a few false beliefs here and there but if she were generally on the wise course in different life-situations, we would attribute wisdom to her. Therefore, understanding involved in selection of the ethical and wiser course in life-situations also seems to be quasi-factive.

It appears that understanding involved in mastery of a language should be similarly taken as quasi-factive. Those who have mastery of a language understand it in the sense of generally having correct beliefs about its syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, etc. But such people are not infallible and can have some false linguistic beliefs leading to some wrong linguistic practices. This seems common even in native speakers. As a result, understanding a language cannot be factive.

Let us turn now briefly to the issue of transparency of understanding. Take the kind of understanding that one possesses in relation to a language that one has a mastery of. Such understanding appears to be transparent in the sense that if it appears to me, a normal person, that I understand certain sentences of a language that I know, then I actually understand those sentences. Appearance of understanding those sentences and actually understanding them are one and the same thing at least at the first-order level. In most cases I cannot be wrong in my understanding of certain usual sentences of a language that I know. Differences of interpretation might arise between me and other speakers but that does not detract from the fact that I did have an understanding and that understanding was, at least, one possible interpretation of the concerned sentences. When someone knows a language, her understanding of its sentences is transparent: when she thinks she understands, she actually understands. There might be exceptional situations where she may not be right in her thinking but, generally, she will get it right. Hence our understanding of language is transparent.

What about understanding involved in grasping the deeper logical or interpretive implications of principles or phenomena or stories? In these cases the situation seems to be different. What might *appear* to me to be a logical or interpretive implication of a principle may not be its *real* logical or interpretive implication. *Thinking* that such and such is the case may not be identical with what is *really* the case.

The case of understanding involved in grasping the ethical and the wiser course in life also looks similar. One might *think* a certain course of action is the ethical or

the wise course, but that may not *actually* be the case. It is, in fact, quite a common human experience that in ethical choices our *thinking* about what is right is not the same thing as what is *actually* right. The same is the case with what one takes to be the wise course of action in a given situation or a range of situations. When it *appears* to me that I understand what the wise course is, this appearance may not coincide with what is *actually* the wise course. *Seeming* to have wisdom and *actually* having wisdom need not coincide.

Hence, it appears that understanding, as an epistemic state, is transparent only in one of its forms mentioned in the Qur'ān, i.e., understanding of a language. In other forms it does not seem to be transparent.

Let us now cast a look on the issue of immunity of understanding to Gettier-style and environmental luck. Let us start with understanding of a language. This type of understanding is equivalent to mastery of a *techne*. Does one “understand” a language even if one masters it through an accident of luck, Gettier-style or environmental? I think the answer is a definite “yes.”

We can imagine scenarios that, I think, support this answer. Imagine two language valleys where people are multilingual. In valley A, many people masquerade as expert language teachers with the ability to effectively teach a language for money. Only a few of these so-called experts are genuine. All the rest are faking in order to make money. In valley B the scene is the opposite. There are many genuine experts and few masqueraders. Two anthropologists, Vale and Gale, arrive in these valleys to study their languages. Vale goes to valley A and starts learning language Shina from a local teacher. Gale arrives in valley B and does the same. Unbeknownst to Vale, her teacher is a complete fake with no expertise in Shina grammar. He teaches her Shina grammar rules by sheer guess. By complete coincidence, he gets the grammar mostly right and Vale ends up successfully learning Shina. In Gale's case, her teacher of Shina, though randomly picked from a host of fakes, turns out to be one of the few genuine experts of Shina in valley B. Gale also ends up mastering Shina. When they return home Vale and Gale can communicate with each other in Shina quite well. It seems, therefore, that they have learned Shina despite having been hit by Gettier-style luck (Vale) and environmental luck (Gale).

A language, even if mastered by sheer accidental luck of either variety, can still be understood. Its understanding doesn't fall prey to accidental luck. Understanding/mastery of a language is, therefore, immune to accidental luck. Intuitively, it appears that neither Gettier-style nor environmental luck can demolish such understanding.

What about the understanding that one has of the deeper implications of principles, or interpretation of phenomena or stories? Is such an understanding, which normally involves a grasp of various kinds of dependence relations, vulnerable to Gettier-style or environmental luck? I think that Kvanvig's Comanche example is instructive in this regard. Just as learning 17th and 18th century Comanche history from a fake scholarly book which is accidentally right in its descriptions does not preclude our understanding of the dynamics of that history, similarly such scenarios cannot preclude our understanding of the deeper implications of principles, or interpretations of phenomena or stories. (The interpretations of phenomena can be in the form of current scientific theories.) We can learn and understand these things even

when our sources are either Gettierized or vulnerable to environmental luck. It does not make a difference to our understanding if it comes through a fake scholarly book that is accidentally correct or a genuine scholarly book that was accidentally picked from a shelf where every other book was a product of fake scholarship. In the first case, we have grasped the relevant connections correctly even if the source is fake accidentally. In the second case, we have again grasped the connections correctly even though the source could have been easily a fake one. We end up understanding the principle or the phenomena or the story in both cases.

As far as understanding the ethical and the wiser course in life is concerned, the same consideration will apply to this as well. As long as we end up learning and understanding the correct ethical principles or proper wisdom, it shouldn't matter whether our source is fake or could have been fake. For all practical purposes our lives will be well served by our understanding.

Overall, therefore, the sort of epistemic state of understanding that the Qur'ānic verses hint at seems to be quasi-factive, transparent in the case of understanding of a language at the first-order level, and immune to epistemic luck.

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Chapter 6

On Value of Knowledge and Understanding



6.1 Introduction

One important problem for contemporary epistemologies is to find an answer to Plato's question as to why knowledge appears to us to be more valuable than *mere* true belief. Some epistemologists, while not denying that knowledge is valuable, have argued that it is the epistemic state of understanding rather than knowledge which is *finally* valuable. In this chapter we look at the views of some of the salient contributors to this debate and argue that Zagzebsky's motive-action model for understanding the value of knowledge seems to work best in addressing the issues involved in the debate about the value of knowledge. Regarding the value of the state of understanding, it will be argued that its *final* value is a result of its holistic and hard-to-achieve nature.

In the sections below, after first looking at some relevant Qur'ānic distinctions and Qur'ānic hints for a solution to the value problem, I move on to discuss the reliabilist positions to assess whether or not they can successfully address the value problem. I then relate some of the findings of this discussion, particularly Berit Brogaard's position, to Zagzebsky's solution of the value problem. Zagzebsky gives us a more holistic model for understanding value of knowledge as compared to what she calls the machine-product model of reliabilists. In her model knowledge is not simply "known belief" but known belief combined with the intellectual virtue of the knower.

Following this I cast a look at Duncan Pritchard's position insofar as he criticizes the so-called *robust virtue epistemology* of Sosa, Zagzebsky, and Greco for its failure to address the value problem. Pritchard's *anti-luck virtue epistemology* and its approach to the value problem is highlighted and Zagzebsky's possible response is underscored. Finally I discuss Kvanvig's and Pritchard's views on understanding and combine them in a way by arguing that understanding being holistic (Kvanvig) is more challenging to achieve (Pritchard) and, therefore, *finally* valuable. The

upshot of the discussion is that Zagzebsky's model effectively addresses the problem of extra and distinctive value of knowledge while Kvanvig's and Pritchard's insights about understanding make us see why it is *finally* valuable.

6.2 Some Related Distinctions in the Qur'ān

The Qur'ān explicitly takes knowledge to be more valuable than the lack thereof. "Say (unto them, O Muhammad): Are those who know equal with those who know not? But only men of understanding will pay heed" (39:9, Pickthall translation). This verse talks about "those who know" and "those who do not know." It compares those who have knowledge with those who do not. Not having knowledge cannot be simply equated with just the state of ignorance. This lack of knowledge could range from ignorance as obliviousness, through false belief to mere true belief. If so, this verse does not obviously equate in value the state of knowledge with true belief. It rhetorically points to the greater value of knowledge compared with other states between knowledge and non-knowledge, such as ignorance, false belief, and true belief. The Qur'ān takes knowledge to be more valuable than mere true belief.

The distinction between knowledge and mere belief is a fundamental one in the Qur'ān. It uses the term *ẓann* as an equivalent of what philosophers have called opinion, guess or belief. The following verse, for example, clearly distinguishes knowledge from *ẓann* or mere opinion or belief or assumption:

And they say, "There is not but our worldly life; we die and live, and nothing destroys us except time." And they have of that no knowledge; they are only assuming [*yāẓunnūna*]. (45:24)

A similar distinction is present in 41:22. Given this distinction between knowledge and opinion or belief, it is important to note that the Qur'ān explicitly distinguishes knowledge not only from belief but also from true belief. Here is Moses talking to Pharaoh:

[Moses] said, "You have already known that none has sent down these [signs] except the Lord of the heavens and the earth as evidence, and indeed I think [*la-aẓunnuka*], O Pharaoh, that you are destroyed." (17:102)

The Pharaoh was ultimately destroyed. Hence, Moses' belief or *ẓann* about Pharaoh's impending destruction was a true belief. The wording of the verse is such that it talks about "knowledge" that Pharaoh had about the signs from the Lord and "true belief" that Moses had about Pharaoh's impending destruction. Many other verses, such as 9:118, 12:42, 17:102, 18:53, 38:24, 41:48, 69:20, 72:12, and 75:28, seem to involve the idea of a true belief.

We noted in Chap. 2 that ignorance is an important epistemic concept in the Qur'ān and that Plato's tripartite distinction between ignorance (*agnosia*), opinion or belief (*doxa*), and knowledge (*episteme*) is present in the Qur'ān. Of course Plato also distinguishes true from false opinion or belief. False belief is a kind of ignorance

for Plato insofar as a mind is focused on “what is not.” Many Qur'ānic verses involve the idea of false belief. For example, it is said:

And they have thereof no knowledge. They follow not except assumption, and indeed, assumption [*ẓann*] avails not against the truth at all. (53:28)

Here knowledge is clearly associated with *truth* and *mere* belief cannot avail anyone against truth. It is clear that the belief that cannot avail against truth will have to be a *false* belief. A similar idea is present in verses such as 7:171, 18:35, 41:22, and 72:7.

In the Qur'ān we have the idea of knowledge, ignorance (which is a kind of false opinion or belief), and true opinion or belief. As verse 39:9 quoted above says, those who have knowledge and those who do not have it cannot be equal. In other words those who have knowledge are clearly in possession of something better or superior or more valuable. If those who do *not* have knowledge lack something valuable, then they do so in comparison to those who *do* have knowledge. Who are these people who do *not* have knowledge? They obviously include those who are ignorant or have false belief. But how about those who lack knowledge but not true belief? Are they similarly lacking in something valuable in comparison to the knowledgeable?

We can answer this question by casting a careful look at the verse about Moses and Pharaoh (17:102) quoted above. Moses attributes *knowledge* to Pharaoh about the *signs* that God had granted him (Moses) as proof of his authenticity as messenger from God. Why does he do so? Pharaoh had seen those *signs* as evidence. However, Moses attributes only belief or opinion, *ẓann*, to himself as far as Pharaoh's impending destruction is concerned. Moses had not yet seen conclusive evidence for his belief though his belief turned out to be true. Compared to Pharaoh, Moses lacked conclusive evidence that could have turned his true belief into knowledge. Hence, true belief, in Qur'ānic terms, is deficient in some ways when compared to knowledge. Hence, those who do *not* have knowledge but only true belief are deficient in some way as compared to those who *do* have knowledge. Obviously their deficiency is not equivalent to the deficiency of those who are ignorant/have false belief; nonetheless, they are deficient. Hence, their deficiency makes them unequal to those who *have* knowledge. Verse 39:9 applies not only to those who are ignorant/have false belief but also to those who have *mere* true belief or opinion but not knowledge. The crucial question that one must face is the same Socrates asked in the *Meno*: how is knowledge more valuable than *mere* true belief/opinion?

This question has been answered by the Qur'ān (and the Islamic tradition) in terms of the *practical* value of knowledge: According to the Qur'ān, while talking to his father the Patriarch Abraham said:

“O my father! to me hath come knowledge which hath not reached thee: so follow me: I will guide thee to a way that is even and straight. (19:43, Ali translation)

I take it that if the Qur'ān takes true opinion/belief to be deficient as compared to knowledge, then whatever such a deficiency might consist in, its removal will produce the more valuable state of knowledge. This verse notes the *practical* value of knowledge granted to Abraham. Knowledge can guide us to *even* and *straight* paths

in all matters of our lives. It leads us onto a path that is neither bumpy nor crooked. These metaphors seem to stand for *avoidance* of error in all of our beliefs, actions, and decisions.

We argued in Chaps. 2 and 4 that the Qur'ān links the epistemic states of knowledge and understanding with the virtues of intellectual conscientiousness or *taqwā* as a moral and epistemic conscience. This means that attainment of the states of knowledge and understanding involves *taqwā*, which (as seen in Chap. 4) has an impulse or motivation for the good as an integral part. It is this virtuous motivation that connects with known or understood beliefs to make the states of knowledge as well as understanding and contributes to their value. Moreover, as understanding is holistic and comprehensive for the Qur'ān, it is much harder to achieve than knowledge. Therefore, it is a higher and more ultimate epistemic goal than the state of propositional knowledge.

In the discussion below, we look at contemporary debate on the value of knowledge and understanding to place these Qur'ānic hints in a contemporary context.

6.3 Preliminary Remarks

How are knowledge, true belief, and understanding to be compared as far as their value goes? We deal with the comparison of knowledge and understanding later but, for now, let us ask: Is knowledge valued more than mere true belief, and why? This is what has been called the value problem in recent epistemology (Zagzebsky 1996, 301–304), first formulated by Plato in the *Meno*, 97a–99d. Part of the discussion between Socrates and Meno is as follows:

SOCRATES: I will tell you. A man who knew the way to Larissa, or anywhere else you like, and went there and guided others would surely lead them well and correctly? – Certainly.

SOCRATES: What if someone had had a correct opinion as to which was the way but had not gone there nor indeed had knowledge of it, would he not also lead correctly? – Certainly.

SOCRATES: And as long as he has the right opinion about that of which the other has knowledge, he will not be a worse guide than the one who knows, as he has a true opinion, though not knowledge. – In no way worse.

SOCRATES: So true opinion is in no way a worse guide to correct action than knowledge. It is this that we omitted in our investigation of the nature of virtue, when we said that only knowledge can lead to correct action, for true opinion can do so also. – So it seems.

SOCRATES: So correct opinion is no less useful than knowledge?

MENO: Yes, to this extent, Socrates. But the man who has knowledge will always succeed, whereas he who has true opinion will only succeed at times.

SOCRATES: How do you mean? Will he who has the right opinion not always succeed, as long as his opinion is right?

MENO: That appears to be so of necessity, and it makes me wonder, Socrates, this being the case, why knowledge is prized far more highly than right opinion, and why they are different. (Cooper 1997, 895)

This quotation, though long, is meant to give us a flavor of the issue. The basic problem, as can be seen, is why knowledge is valued more than true belief or opinion when both are equally useful. This is the so-called *primary* value problem.

Epistemologists formulate two other value problems, one in terms of the unique or distinctive value that is enjoyed by knowledge as opposed to any other cognitive state, and the other in terms of knowledge having a different *kind* and not degree of value than any other cognitive state that falls short of being knowledge, for example, true belief. What they mean by unique or distinctive value of knowledge is that knowledge is supposed to have value over and above the sum of the values of its constituent parts (see Kvanvig 2003, x). Duncan Pritchard calls these three problems primary, secondary, and tertiary value problems (Pritchard et al. 2010, 5–8).

A number of theorists have attempted to address the value problem(s) from their respective positions within epistemology. Zagzebsky, who is primarily interested in the primary value problem, claims that knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief because it is based in intellectual virtue. Kvanvig, who addresses the so-called secondary value problem, argues that the cognitive state of understanding, rather than knowledge, has distinctive value. He does not think that knowledge has distinctive value in the sense of being more valuable than the sum of the value of its constituent parts. Process reliabilists, whose position on this score has been criticized and rejected by Zagzebsky, attribute the value of knowledge to the reliability of the process that produces knowledge. Virtue reliabilists like Sosa and Greco defend the reliabilist's position on the value problem by defining knowledge as true belief that is true *because of* reliable virtuous processes of belief formation by our cognitive abilities. Knowledge is a kind of achievement, a cognitive success that can be credited to the epistemic agent. Sosa's position differs from Greco as far as the interpretation of the "because of" relation goes, but both take knowledge to be an achievement. That is true of Zagzebsky as well, although her position on the nature of intellectual virtue is fundamentally different from Sosa and Greco. As noted earlier in the book, she takes intellectual virtues to be acquired dispositions or traits (like open-mindedness or intellectual courage) while Sosa and Greco consider our reliably functioning natural faculties (like perception, memory, reason, introspection, and induction) to be intellectual virtues. For all three of them, knowledge is true belief resulting from exercise of intellectual virtues. Knowledge, then, is an achievement on the part of the epistemic agent for which she deserves credit. This achievement aspect gives knowledge its distinctive value as opposed to mere true belief.

6.4 Reliabilist and Zagzebskian Approaches to the Value Problem

Process reliabilists¹ define knowledge in terms of true belief produced by a reliable belief forming process. According to Zagzebsky (2000, 2009) process reliabilists, therefore, believe that reliability of the process that produces knowledge is key to

¹Process reliabilism was started by F.P. Ramsey (1931) in his essay "Knowledge." However, one of the earliest developed versions of this position is to be found in Alvin Goldman (1979). For an overview of the history of this position see Goldman and Beddor (2016).

understanding the additional value that knowledge possesses compared to *mere* true belief. Zagzebsky has criticized this view (2000, 301–4; 2009, 109–114) by pointing out that a good cup of coffee produced by a reliable espresso machine is not more valuable than a good cup of coffee produced by a not-so-reliable machine. Reliability of the machine does not add any special value to the cup of coffee. In the same way, the reliability of the process that produces true belief does not add any further value to it. Zagzebsky's argument here is a version of the so-called swamp-ing problem. According to this problem, any value that a reliable process might have is "swamped" by the value of true belief. Reliability of a belief forming process cannot add any further value to the state of true belief because reliability of the process cannot enhance the value of true belief any further (see Kvanvig 2003). Reliably formed true belief about an entity B is equal in value to the unreliably formed true belief about B. So if knowledge of B consists in reliably formed true belief that B, then its value is no more than simple true belief that B. Hence, reliabilism cannot address the problem of additional value of knowledge effectively.

This is an argument against simple process reliabilism as a solution of the value problem. However, Zagzebsky extends it to virtue reliabilism as well. She says:

[T]here are versions of reliabilism that identify knowledge with true belief resulting from reliable faculties or agents. As developed by Sosa and Greco, these theories are more complicated than simple reliabilism, but notice that if the good-making feature of a belief-forming faculty or agent is only its reliability, then faculty reliabilism and agent reliabilism have the same problem as process reliabilism: being the product of a reliable faculty or agent does not add value to the product. (2009, 111)

Zagzebsky, in this passage, mentions only *reliability* as the good-making feature of belief-forming faculty or agent. That means that insofar as Sosa's and Greco's virtue reliabilisms (Cf. Sosa 1991 and Greco 1999) are credit theories of knowledge, her argument in this passage can be directed at them only if they follow what she calls the machine-product model of the knower and the knowledge. Under such a model, apparently, the epistemic agent is the machine and epistemic states such as belief or knowledge are products. Once produced, the product acquires an independent status. In such a model, the credit accrued by the epistemic agent for the virtuous exercise of her abilities in gaining knowledge does not transfer to knowledge (compare with 124). Hence, under such a model credit theories cannot address the problem of additional value of knowledge.²

Zagzebsky's argument here against reliabilisms of a specific model has been criticized for the conception of value that it assumes. Berit Brogaard (Brogaard in Greco and Turri 2012, 189) notes that this argument is based on the Moorean conception of value that need not be correct. Using Wlodek Rabinowicz and Toni Roennow-Rasmussen's view (1999, 33–49; 2003, 389–403), which is based on Christine Korsgaard's (1983, 169–95) distinction between *intrinsic* value on the one hand and *final* value on the other, Brogaard argues against the position that final value of a product has to supervene on the intrinsic properties of the things that go

²Zagzebsky (2009) notes that among the credit theorists of knowledge Sosa continues to follow this model while Wayne Riggs and John Greco do not (fn 18, 124).

to constitute it. (Supervenience here means that while final value cannot be *reduced* to the intrinsic properties of the things, there can be no difference in the final value without there being a corresponding difference in the intrinsic properties.) In other words, extra value of knowledge need not supervene on the value of true belief and the value of intellectual virtue. Brogaard concludes by saying that “it is not clear that generic reliabilists’ adherence to the machine-product model of belief prevents them from explaining the extra value of knowledge. For the value of a source may transfer to the product, even if the source and product are not internally connected” (Brogaard 2012, 190). Rabinowicz and Roennow-Rasmussen have pointed out that “we often attribute extra value to things that are extrinsically related to something else that we value” (Brogaard 2012, 189). They give the example of Princess Diana’s dress and an exact copy. The dress may be valued more by us for its own sake than its copy because of its *extrinsic* relation to Princess Diana. This external relation with her accounts for the extra value of the dress for us, although both dresses have the exact same intrinsic properties. Hence, the final value of an object need not always supervene on its intrinsic properties.

If this reasoning is correct, then, it is contended that Zagzebsky’s argument against machine-product models of reliabilisms fails. However, simply introducing the distinctions between final value and extrinsic value on the one hand and intrinsic and extrinsic value on the other does not establish that knowledge comes to accrue final value because of its extrinsic relation with something else. In other words, we must show by argument that knowledge is analogous in this respect to Princess Diana’s dress or some such object related to someone whom we greatly value. Brogaard has not given us any argument in the matter. She has simply pointed out that there is such transfer of value to objects or states because of their extrinsic relations to something/someone valuable to us. The real challenge is to show that knowledge is such a state and not simply assume that it is such a state. Perhaps Brogaard means to suggest that even if the “known belief” is not internally related to the reliability of the belief-forming faculty under the machine-product model, it is externally related to it and, hence, might be claimed to have accrued extra value. But this begs the question as to why such an external relation with “reliable faculties” only and why not with something like “evidence.” In other words, why shouldn’t we claim that such an external relation with the supporting evidence for the known belief is what gives it its final value? Why are reliably functioning faculties special in this regard?

It is not clear, therefore, how under the machine-product model of the knower and the knowledge, the latter will come to accrue final value over and above the intrinsic values of reliably functioning faculties and true belief or intellectual virtue and true belief. As Zagzebsky points out: why should the reliability, or virtue, or credit of the machine (knower) transfer to the product (knowledge)? In the case of Princess Diana her value for us transfers to her dress, but there are lots of differences between finally valuable objects like her dress and knowledge as a state. There are numerous cases of knowledge that have no value or hardly any value for us even when we acquire them through intellectually virtuous ways. For example, to know a random, say the 81st, entry on page 300 of the telephone book of my

hometown, I'll have to methodically count the names on the page from the top to the 81st. I have to be careful and exercise intellectual virtue to get it right. Yet there is no final value for me in this particular piece of knowledge, not the least bit. I don't come to value it for its own sake, even when I accrue some sort of credit for having done it methodically. Why should it be the case that in certain other cases of knowledge, my careful exercise of intellectual faculty/virtue should transfer extra value to knowledge?

It appears, therefore, that even if we shift to a Korsgaardian conception of value, the machine-product model fails to address the primary value problem. Zagzebsky's criticism of the model has not been displaced. However, Goldman and Olsson (2009, 19–41) have recently responded to the swamping argument against simple reliabilism. As Goldman is one of the earliest proponents of simple reliabilism, this response is important to take note of. According to Goldman and Olsson simple reliabilism can sidestep the swamping argument altogether. They present two solutions to the value problem that do not face, in their opinion, the challenge presented to simple reliabilism by the swamping argument. The first solution they call The Conditional Probability Solution and the second Value Autonomization. The first solution is based on the claim that reliable ways of belief formation that produce knowledge come to possess an independent property, i.e., the property of making future cases of similar beliefs more likely true. The other solution, they claim, complements this one and is a psychological hypothesis about how instrumentalist value of reliable processes can change into *autonomous* fundamental good.

Goldman and Olsson illustrate the first solution in terms of the espresso machine example in the following words:

If a good cup of espresso is produced by a reliable espresso machine, and this machine remains at one's disposal, then the probability that one's next cup of espresso will be good is greater than the probability that the next cup of espresso will be good given that the first good cup was just luckily produced by an unreliable machine. If a reliable coffee machine produces good espresso for you today and remains at your disposal, it can normally produce a good espresso for you tomorrow. The reliable production of one good cup of espresso may or may not stand in the singular-causation relation to any subsequent good cup of espresso. But the reliable production of a good cup of espresso does raise or enhance the probability of a subsequent good cup of espresso. This probability enhancement is a valuable property to have. (2009, 28)

What is true of coffee cups is true of beliefs. If we have two mechanisms MR and MU for belief formation, where MR is reliable and MU is unreliable, they both might produce true beliefs in us today, MR reliably and MU by sheer guess. But tomorrow the probability of getting a true belief from MR in a similar situation is going to be definitely higher than the probability of getting a true belief from the unreliable MU. This property of reliable mechanism MR is what makes it more valuable than MU.

When a reliable process produces the composite state of knowledge, the latter comes to acquire a valuable property whereby it enhances the chances of producing similar knowledge in the future through the use of the same reliable process. Goldman and Olsson argue that this solution offered by simple reliabilism com-

pletely sidesteps the swamping argument because it is “silent about the value that attaches to the reliable process *per se*” and it is also silent about “adding” any value to the value of true belief to make it into knowledge that, then, has greater value than true belief itself (2009, 28–29). This solution to the value problem is focused entirely on the property attained by the epistemic state of knowledge by virtue of its being produced by a reliable process, the property of enhancing the chances of future production of similar knowledge by the same reliable process. Such a property cannot accrue to an epistemic state of knowledge or true belief produced by an unreliable process because an unreliable process cannot enhance the chances of future production of similar epistemic states. There is no involvement in this solution of any value that may attach to a reliable process or such a value getting *added* to the epistemic state of true belief to make it into knowledge. Hence, there is no question of such value getting swamped by the value of true belief.

The point of the solution is that simple reliabilism can effectively solve the value problem and is not a victim of the swamping argument. The other solution offered by Goldman and Olsson, claimed to complement this one, is a psychological hypothesis about how instrumentalist value of reliable processes can change into an *independent* or *autonomous* fundamental good. Whether or not such a psychological hypothesis is credible looks like an empirical question that should be investigated on its own. Hence, we stay away from commenting on this hypothesis here. Our primary concern is an evaluation of the Conditional Probability Solution.

On the face of it, this looks like a neat solution to the value problem. It also makes the swamping argument appear less threatening insofar as it shows a way of handling the value problem without identifying a valuable property in the knowledge-making mechanism which is then added to true belief to gain the more valuable state of knowledge. However, the solution fails to realize that evidentialism will work equally well for generating the property that Goldman and Olsson claim for reliable processes of producing knowledge. This can be seen from the following case parallel to Goldman and Olsson’s case for reliabilism.

Let us take two of my true beliefs about the talent that two of my students, Jim and Randy, have for logical studies. After carefully checking Jim’s entire academic record I have concluded that he will shine in my symbolic logic class. This is my evidentially justified true belief. However, I did no such checking for Randy because I had a class to teach just as he came to visit me in my office. From our brief interaction I guessed that Randy would also shine in my symbolic logic class. This was my evidentially unjustified belief that, let us say, turned out to be true. Both Jim and Randy shone in my symbolic logic class. Now if I repeat the same procedure in the future for my students Tom and Harry, the probability of the evidence-based prediction about Tom will be higher than the probability of non-evidence based prediction about Harry. The simple reason is that in the earlier case Randy’s shining in my class offers no support for the prediction that Harry will also shine. It does not add a property to any future case of a similar belief. However, Jim’s case does offer support for Tom’s case. If a certain kind of evidence led to a true belief on my part in one case, then similar evidence in another case will likely do the same. Hence, the evidence-based case of Jim does add a property to any similar future case, the prop-

erty of making it more likely true. Therefore, it appears that the conditional probability solution doesn't seem to be specific to simple reliabilism. It seems to work equally for evidentialism as well. As a result we cannot claim that simple reliabilism solves the primary value problem by creating a special property of higher probability for a similar reliably produced future true belief. If that is a solution at all, it is a solution equally offered by evidentialism. It appears, therefore, that Zagzebsky's criticism has not been blunted by the solution offered by Goldman and Olsson just as it was not blunted by Brogaard's proposal of changing our conception of value.

However, Brogaard has a promising argument of her own against the claim that virtue reliabilism can solve the primary value problem. This argument is meant to show that virtuous reliable mechanisms of belief formation cannot be distinguished from the non-virtuous belief formation mechanisms in a *principled* way. The difference between them is only a matter of degree and, hence, the virtuous mechanisms may explain the extra value of knowledge only in a limited fashion. I believe, however, that even this *limited* success of virtue reliabilism in explaining the extra value of knowledge requires Zagzebsky's motive-action model of knowledge.³

In this argument Brogaard distinguishes between "generic" reliabilism and virtue reliabilism (2012, 185–203).⁴ While generic reliabilism is criticized by Zagzebsky, virtue reliabilism (which is the position of virtue epistemologists like Ernest Sosa and John Greco, among others⁵) appears to her to have a better chance. In Brogaard's words:

Zagzebsky believes that if knowledge is to have more value than true belief, its source must have an internal connection of the same sort as that between an act and its motive. The state consisting of a virtuous motive and right action has more value than right action alone. Zagzebsky therefore suggests that we understand knowledge, not as a state consisting of a known belief, but as a whole consisting of the true belief and its source. If knowledge is such a whole, and the source of the belief has independent value, then knowledge is more valuable than true belief. Virtue reliabilism identifies knowledge with a broader state that comprises not only the known belief but also the intellectual virtue of the agent. So, according to Zagzebsky, the extra value of knowledge derives in part from the independent (i.e., intrinsic) value of intellectual virtue. (2012, 187–88)

³ See footnote 7 below for the basic idea of this model.

⁴ The distinction between process and virtue reliabilism is a matter of focus in the sense that the former deals with justification and the latter aims at defining *knowledge*. As Goldman and Beddor (2016, accessed Dec. 26, 2017) put it: "Virtue reliabilism differs from traditional process reliabilism in its choice of analysandum. Historically process reliabilists have focused on giving an account of *justification*; by contrast, virtue reliabilists have focused on giving an account of *knowledge*. However, one certainly could try to extend one's virtue reliabilism to justification. Indeed, if one assumes that knowledge entails justification, being a virtue reliabilist about the former seems to lead naturally to virtue reliabilism about the latter. And if epistemic competences are understood as reliable processes, the resulting virtue reliabilist account of justification would presumably amount to a version of process reliabilism."

⁵ See Sosa (1991), and Greco (2002, 287–315; 2007, 164–203). Also see footnote 2 above for reference to Zagzebsky's reservation that Sosa might still be committed to a machine-product model of knowledge.

Brogaard goes on to note that Wayne Riggs' view (2002, 79–96) is similar to Zagzebsky in respect of taking knowledge as a *state* causally produced by the epistemic agent. In that case the agent has to be given credit for producing a valuable product and “it is natural to think that part of the extra value of knowledge derives from the knower's achievement in acquiring it” (Brogaard 2012, 188).

Brogaard herself is skeptical about virtue reliabilism as having greater potential to address the value problem and questions the claim that generic reliabilism is open to Zagzebsky's criticism of machine-product criticism while virtue reliabilism is not (188–90). Brogaard's key point in this regard is that the distinction between generic and virtue reliabilism breaks down because virtue reliabilism does not have a principled way of distinguishing between reliable mechanisms of knowing that are stable dispositions and those that are “strange and fleeting.” This is a crucial distinction for virtue reliabilism because stable dispositions are reliable mechanisms of knowing that are virtuous as opposed to the reliable but strange and fleeting mechanisms that do not exhibit virtuosity. Credit that accrues to an epistemic agent for exercising stable dispositions to achieve knowledge of a certain matter is due to the fact that such reliable stable dispositions are virtuous. Knowledge is attained by the epistemic agent because of virtuous exercise of such dispositions.

But Brogaard points out that “[a]cquired skills of perception, including those that make use of advanced technology can yield knowledge” (194). She goes on to quote the following passage from Greco to show that virtue reliabilists grant such a position:

Innate vision can give rise to knowledge if it is reliably accurate. But so can acquired skills of perception and acquired methods of inquiry, including those involving highly specialized training or even advanced technology. So long as such habits are both stable and successful, they make up the kind of character that gives rise to knowledge. (Greco 1999, 287)

So true beliefs can be caused by reliable innate abilities of an epistemic agent or even by the methods or powers acquired by her. Brogaard notes, *a la* David Lewis,⁶ that a perfected prosthetic eye will similarly be an acquired skill or power providing genuine *seeing* to blind people.

But if such acquired methods and powers can produce knowledge in us, how are we going to distinguish them from some kind of a supernatural device that, for example, automatically blurs the vision of Henry, the fake barn county visitor, as soon as he lays his eyes on a fake barn? So, although the entire county is full of fake barns and there is only one real barn in the vicinity, Henry sees it when he looks at it. The supernatural mechanism in his head plays a corrective role and keeps Henry from seeing the real-looking fake barns and making false beliefs about them. It appears that this sort of supernatural devices are similar to a prosthetic eye. Hence, “the virtue reliabilists do not succeed in drawing a principled distinction between the sources of belief that are grounded in the agent's virtuous abilities and those that are not, because the sources that are allegedly ruled out by virtue reliabilism as being sources of knowledge because they are insufficiently grounded in the agent's

⁶Here Brogaard quotes from Lewis (1988, 85).

abilities are not very different from a wide range of “acquired methods of inquiry” that are not ruled out by virtue reliabilism as being sources of knowledge.” (Brogaard 2012, 195).

If such a distinction cannot be made by virtue reliabilism, it cannot be distinguished from generic reliabilism because, in that case, there is no difference-in-kind between virtuous reliable mechanisms of belief formation and the non-virtuous reliable mechanisms of belief formation. There might be a difference in degree, says Brogaard, but that can do only limited work in explaining the value of knowledge over and above mere true belief. In some cases of knowledge, the epistemic agent will deserve more credit and, hence, knowledge will be more valuable than mere true belief. But in other cases, such as Henry, the fake barn county visitor with a supernatural device in his head, knowledge will not be creditable to the agent and, hence, will hardly be more valuable than mere true belief. But since there is no qualitative difference between generic and virtue reliabilisms, both can explain the extra value of knowledge over mere true belief in this limited fashion. This way of explaining the value of knowledge is not special to virtue reliabilism.

It may be noted that even this limited way of explaining the value of knowledge will be possible for reliabilism only if it takes knowledge to be a total state comprising the known belief and intellectual virtues of the epistemic agent. This is so because, contra Brogaard, changing from a Moorean to a Korsgaardian view of value will not do the work for virtue reliabilism, as we saw above. But if we accept Zagzebsky’s holistic motive-action model⁷ of belief/knowledge, then just as a good motive adds to the moral worth of a right action, intellectual virtue will add to the value of the epistemic state of true belief.

Overall, therefore, Brogaard’s argument for her claim that there is no principled distinction to be drawn between generic and virtue reliabilism seems effective. However, her claim that under a Korsgaardian conception of value, virtue reliabilism can provide at least a limited solution to the value problem seems to work in the framework of a motive-action model of belief formation. The key thing, however, is that Brogaard’s analysis has shown that generic and virtue reliabilism do not have a general solution to the value problem. In other words, Brogaard does not see much potential in externalist positions like reliabilism to address this issue effectively. (In externalist positions an epistemic agent does *not* have subjective access to whatever justifies her belief.) Hence, she argues for an internalist⁸ approach, where the agent has subjective access to her justification for a belief, for solving the value problem. However, I believe that her internalist approach also points toward a holistic motive-action model for understanding knowledge.

Here Brogaard contends that if we characterize the value problem differently, we can see how an internalist approach fares better in dealing with it. This other way to characterize the value problem is to ask why knowledge is more valuable than *mere*

⁷This model takes knowledge to be the broader state involving intellectual virtue as well as the known belief rather than simply the known belief. See Zagzebsky (1996, Part III; 2009, 127).

⁸For a helpful characterization and discussion of externalism/internalism debate in epistemology see Zagzebsky (1996, 31–43).

justified true belief. This question, she thinks, can be answered, if we realize that when we have a justified belief in p but not knowledge of p , we believe (internally) in the veracity of the evidence that justifies our belief in p but *in reality* our evidence is not veridical. In other words our second-order belief about the veracity of our evidence for our belief in p is false. This, however, is not the case if we have *knowledge* of p . In the case of knowledge, our second-order belief that our evidence for our belief in p is veridical is *in reality* true. This gives us an ability to explain our belief in p .

On Brogaard's story, therefore, an internalist approach to justification gives us the ability to explain our true belief through our second-order true belief. This way of explaining is tantamount to seeing "interrelationships between things" as per Kvanvig's characterization of explanatory understanding (Kvanvig 2003, 199). Therefore, having *knowledge* of p is more valuable than having *mere* justified belief in p because the former gives us an explanatory understanding of why p is true while the latter fails on this count. Knowledge "is more valuable because of the understanding we have of the explanatory connections among reason, truth, and belief when we know something" (Kvanvig 2003, 201).

There can be two reactions to this internalist view of the value of knowledge. First, such a view of knowledge seems to make value of knowledge parasitic on the epistemic state of understanding. Second, it is a definition of knowledge that seems to fit the motive-action model proposed by Zagzebsky because it involves understanding of explanatory connections. Strangely though, Brogaard criticizes Zagzebsky and Riggs for having moved to the motive-action model because of their Moorean conception of value (2012, 189). But even though Brogaard is explicitly committed to a Korsgaardian conception of value, she still needs to use the motive-action model for giving an internalist explanation of the value of knowledge. It appears, therefore, that Brogaard's diagnosis of why Zagzebsky and Riggs have moved to the motive-action model is misleading. Regardless of one's conception of value, it is simply a better model for understanding the value of knowledge.

6.5 Pritchard on the Value of Knowledge and Understanding

Duncan Pritchard has taken exception to the solution proposed by Zagzebsky and others with similar epistemological views. He has argued that knowledge as achievement thesis of robust virtue epistemology, advocated by Ernest Sosa, Linda Zagzebsky, and John Greco, is incapable of solving the value problem (Pritchard et al. 2010, ch. 2). He sums up the robust virtue epistemology position for the final value of knowledge in the following argument:

- (P1) Achievements are successes that are because of ability (Achievement thesis);
- (P2) knowledge is a cognitive success that is because of cognitive ability (Robust Virtue Epistemology);

(C1) so, knowledge is a cognitive achievement; KA [Knowledge as Achievement] thesis;

(P3) achievements are finally valuable (Value of Achievement thesis);

(C2) so knowledge has final value. (31)

Pritchard presents a number of criticisms of this approach. His primary concern, however, is that knowledge is not always a cognitive achievement. He argues that although knowledge as achievement thesis can successfully handle Gettier-style epistemic luck, it fails to handle what Pritchard calls *environmental* luck. In Gettier-style luck an epistemic agent ends up forming a true belief not because of successful exercise of her epistemic abilities but through the intervention of accidental (good) luck that makes a belief true despite the fact that unbeknownst to the epistemic agent the belief, unluckily, is not initially based on credible fact. For example, an epistemic agent looks at a field and sees a sheep, which unbeknownst to the agent is a statue. But hiding behind the statue is a real sheep. The epistemic agent's belief that there is a sheep in the field is true. Such a true belief is a gettierized true belief and, hence, not knowledge. Knowledge as achievement thesis can handle this type of luck effectively because the true belief of the agent is not *because* of her abilities. It is not knowledge because it cannot be credited to the agent's abilities as an achievement.

However, Pritchard points out that there is another type of luck, *environmental* luck, which the knowledge as achievement thesis cannot handle. Pritchard brings in the fake barns county where the epistemic agent looks at the only real barn by sheer luck and forms the true belief that there is a barn in front of him. There is no question that he forms this true belief *because* of the exercise of his cognitive abilities. Under the knowledge as achievement thesis, he is in possession of knowledge that there is a barn in front of him. However, such a conclusion is *counterintuitive* because the epistemic agent could have easily *missed* the one real barn and cast his eyes on a fake one. Hence, it is sheer *environmental* luck that makes him attain a true belief. He cannot be attributed knowledge in this case, but proponents of knowledge as achievement thesis must grant him knowledge. This, according to Pritchard, goes to show that robust virtue epistemology, which regards knowledge as credit-worthy achievement, cannot establish that knowledge is a cognitive achievement and, as a result, *finally* valuable like other achievements. This approach needs to *strengthen* its requirements on what constitutes knowledge in order to rule out cases of *environmental* luck.

Pritchard points to testimonial knowledge as well and says that as Jennifer Lackey (2007, 345–361) has argued, we do not gain testimonial knowledge because of an exercise of our cognitive abilities. It is just passed on to us by the testifier. Hence, it is the testifier who deserves *primary* credit in cases of testimonial knowledge. Testimonial knowledge cannot be *primarily* credited to the epistemic agent who gains it from the testifier. Pritchard goes into a fine-tuned discussion of Lackey's position here but for our purposes it suffices to note this general conclusion that testimonial knowledge does not accrue primary credit to the epistemic agent. A visitor who learns the location of the Sears Tower (Lackey's example) on her first arrival

in Chicago from a resident of the vicinity cannot be credited for having achieved this knowledge through an exercise of her cognitive abilities. Therefore, proponents of the knowledge as achievement thesis will have to *weaken* their thesis here in order to accommodate cases like the Chicago visitor.

Pritchard concludes that the fake barns county and Chicago visitor case pull the knowledge as achievement thesis in opposite directions. This thesis of robust virtue epistemology, therefore, faces difficulties that are “tricky.”

But once this thesis is found wanting in its ability to account for testimonial knowledge and rule out cases of *environmental* luck, robust virtue epistemology loses its ability to establish that knowledge has *final* value because knowledge can no longer be viewed as achievement. Therefore, robust virtue epistemology does not have a solution to the value problem.

Pritchard does not think knowledge has final value and by way of diagnosing as to why knowledge nonetheless appears to have such value he uses his *anti-luck virtue epistemology*. Anti-luck virtue epistemology is based on a balanced combination of two “master intuitions” about knowledge, i.e., the *ability* intuition and the *anti-luck* intuition (Cf. Pritchard et al. 2010, 51–53). According to the first intuition, when one knows, one’s epistemic success is in large measure creditable to one’s cognitive abilities. This intuition is at work in virtue epistemology. However, virtue epistemology, Pritchard argues, has failed to accommodate the anti-luck intuition about knowledge. According to this intuition “if one knows then it ought not to be the case that one’s true belief could easily have been false” (51). Accordingly Pritchard’s anti-luck epistemology defines knowledge as follows:

Knowledge is safe belief that arises out of the reliable character traits that make up one’s cognitive character, such that one’s cognitive success is to a significant degree creditable to one’s cognitive character. (54)

This definition accommodates not only the ability intuition but also has a safety condition that addresses the anti-luck intuition.

The question then is how Pritchard’s anti-luck epistemology fares when it comes to addressing the value problem. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Pritchard believes that in fact there are three formulations of the value problem: primary, secondary, and tertiary. The tertiary value problem is about the final value of knowledge, i.e., the value that knowledge has *for its own sake*. Here Pritchard accepts that knowledge is not finally valuable because, as he shows in his analysis of knowledge as achievement thesis briefly presented above, not all knowledge is creditable achievement on the part of the knower. The tertiary value problem is a pseudo-problem. Pritchard contends that knowledge only appears to be *finally* valuable because in many cases it *is* a creditable achievement on the part of the knower. We tend to wrongly believe that it has *final* value. Another reason that Pritchard adduces in this regard is that knowledge can coincide with understanding, which is always a kind of cognitive achievement and, hence, *finally* valuable (Cf. 63). Therefore we end up taking knowledge as *finally* valuable. The tertiary value problem, therefore, is dissolved.

However, Pritchard believes that his epistemology does have a solution to the primary and secondary value problems. He addresses these formulations of the problem by appeal to the *practical* value of knowledge as argued for by Edward Craig (1990). According to Craig a society that lacks any concept of knowledge will be hard-pressed to introduce one because of its practical utility in identifying “reliable informants” (Pritchard et al. 2010, 60). The concept of knowledge is linked with practical utility in this sense. Given this practical utility of the concept of knowledge, Pritchard addresses the primary and secondary value problems through this. Regarding the primary value problem he says: “knowledge is never epistemically more valuable than mere true belief, even though it is typically of greater practical value” (64). Practical value in this context is to be understood in terms of Craig’s idea of why the concept of knowledge evolved in the first place, i.e., as a tool for identification of reliable informants. Similarly the secondary value problem, that knowledge is distinctively valuable or knowledge has more value than any of its constituent parts like, say, justification and true belief etc., is resolved by the same greater *practical* value of knowledge as compared to its proper sub-parts. Knowledge has “more instrumental value” than its parts (63–64).

As noted above, knowledge does not have *final* value for Pritchard and appears to be finally valuable only because it can coincide with the epistemic state of understanding. Pritchard, therefore, believes that it is the state of understanding that has final value. We discussed the basics of Pritchard’s view of understanding in Chap. 4. He takes atomistic understanding to be the paradigmatic type of understanding and argues that it can coincide with propositional knowledge. However, in Pritchard’s view such understanding is not undermined by what he calls *environmental* luck, whereas propositional knowledge can be so undermined. That differentiates atomistic understanding from knowledge. Environmental luck, as noted above, is the kind of luck that intervenes in cases like the fake barns county visitor Henry. He accidentally casts his eyes on the only real barn in the area and forms the true belief that there is a barn in front of him. Since he could have easily cast his eyes on a fake barn, his true belief is accidentally true and, hence, not knowledge. But, Pritchard argues, such luck does not undermine understanding. He gives a parallel example. Suppose that as Pritchard arrives at his street he finds his house on fire. He asks a fire officer why his house is on fire and gets the answer that it is because of faulty wiring. That happens to be the true cause of the incident. Pritchard has relevant beliefs about how faulty wiring can cause a house to burn. Now suppose further that there is a fancy dress party nearby and guests are on their way to the party dressed as fire officers. Pritchard accidentally asked the real fire officer why his house was on fire. He could have easily asked a fake fire officer the same question in that environment. So Pritchard does not have the *knowledge* as to why his house is on fire. But, in such a situation, does he *understand* why his house is on fire? Pritchard thinks that the answer is “yes.”

Understanding, Pritchard argues, is an achievement that the epistemic agent succeeds in attaining because of her cognitive abilities. Achievements are successes due to one’s abilities. Virtue epistemologists take knowledge and understanding to be successes that result from virtuous exercise of one’s cognitive abilities. Therefore,

knowledge and understanding are species of achievements. Pritchard distinguishes his position in this regard from epistemologists like Zagzebsky, Sosa, and Greco. He attributes what he calls the *weak achievement thesis* to them. This is simply the claim that “[a]chievements are successes that are because of ability” (Pritchard et al. 2010, 70). The *strong achievement thesis*, the position taken by Pritchard, is the claim that “[a]chievements are successes that are because of ability where the success in question either involves the overcoming of a significant obstacle or the exercise of a significant level of ability” (70). Pritchard argues that it is the strong achievement thesis that makes it clear why understanding has *final* value. This is because understanding involves “exercise of a significant level of ability” or overcoming of “a significant obstacle.” Knowledge sometimes does not involve these things. For example testimonial knowledge does not involve such exercise of a significant level of ability and, hence, can be had by an epistemic agent without having the related understanding of a situation. In Pritchard’s example his schoolboy son, if told by Pritchard that their house burned because of faulty firing, will have the knowledge but not understanding of why their house burned (81). For these reasons knowledge need not be a significant achievement on the part of an epistemic agent and, hence, not *finally* valuable. However, understanding cannot be had without exercise of significant levels of ability, i.e., without involving cognitive achievement. Pritchard says:

Indeed, there is good reason to think that all understanding involves cognitive achievement. More specifically, there is good reason to hold that all understanding involves cognitive achievement even by the lights of the more restrictive strong achievement thesis. Recall that the moral of the barn façade case...was that one could exhibit a cognitive achievement and yet lack knowledge, because of how knowledge, unlike cognitive achievement, is incompatible with environmental epistemic luck. The same applies to understanding. When one couples this observation to the fact that the cases in which an agent has knowledge while not exhibiting a cognitive achievement are cases in which the agent lacks the relevant understanding, then one can see that there is a strong *prima facie* case for thinking that all understanding involves cognitive achievement. (82)

Because understanding is always a cognitive achievement, it is *finally* valuable. Pritchard concludes that as far as the problem of *final* value of epistemic states goes, we need to look at understanding for its solution rather than knowledge.

These insights of Pritchard’s regarding both the value of knowledge and understanding are not fundamentally contradictory of either Zagzebsky’s solution to the value problem or her views on understanding. She does state clearly that “easy knowledge” like passive perception or memory or testimony need not involve reflective exercise of intellectual virtue or conscientiousness. A conscientious epistemic agent has a lot of unreflective knowledge and were its veracity to become questionable for some reason, the epistemic agent would exercise intellectual virtue to check its correctness. However, it will be “a kind of intellectual neurosis” to reflectively check every epistemic state that we find ourselves in (see Zagzebsky 2014, 144). Therefore, Zagzebsky’s solution to the value problem is not challenged by the presence of easy knowledge. Such knowledge can/does exist and, in counterfactual situations, will be assessed by the conscientious knower. Hence it does have potential

value that can be understood through the Zagzebsky model. Also, since her view of understanding is holistic, as seen in Chap. 5, it obviously takes some doing on the part of the epistemic agent to achieve such an understanding of a subject matter. Hence, it will be a significant achievement for an agent to attain such understanding.

6.6 Kvanvig on Distinctive Value of Knowledge and Understanding

Earlier Jonathan Kvanvig (2003) reached a conclusion similar to Pritchard in relation to the value of understanding. In his *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding* (2003) he explores the question of what has been called “the unique value” of knowledge. This is the question of how knowledge is more valuable than any proper subset of its parts. As noted above, Pritchard labeled this the secondary value problem.

Kvanvig, however, does not believe that this problem can be solved by appeal to the *practical* value of knowledge. He notes that Socrates goes on to distinguish knowledge from mere true belief by pointing out that knowledge is true belief that has been *tethered* by working out a reason or account for it whereas mere true belief is fluid or unstable. The question then becomes this: How does being *tethered* make knowledge more valuable than mere true belief? When we formulate it in the perspective of contemporary analyses of knowledge, it becomes the question of how knowledge can have more value than any of its proper parts like true belief or justification, etc.

Kvanvig considers presumed parts of knowledge one by one to assess whether knowledge has value over and above theirs and concludes in the negative.

First he takes up true belief and argues that the question of the distinctive value of knowledge cannot be solved by looking at this proper subset of the constituents of knowledge. He accepts Socrates’ view from the *Meno* that the practical value of true belief is the same as that of knowledge. My true belief about the road to Larissa and my knowledge about the road to Larissa can both take me to Larissa equally effectively. Knowledge does not have any value above that of mere true belief.

He then takes up *reliably* produced true belief and brings the *swamping problem* to bear upon the issue. As noted earlier, the basic idea of the swamping problem is that a reliably produced true belief cannot have more value than an unreliably produced true belief. As long as both beliefs are true, any other feature like *having been reliably produced* fails to give additional or distinctive value to the one so produced. Truth of the belief *swamps* any other valuable property like *having been reliably produced*. Hence, reliably produced true belief, if we take it to be knowledge, fails to explain the distinctive value of knowledge.

Next Kvanvig considers subjectively justified true belief and virtuously produced true belief as possible candidates for explaining the distinctive value of knowledge.

But these approaches are also rejected because they fall prey to the Gettier problem and any efforts at defining knowledge, by adding further conditions to rule out the Gettier problem, produce only *ad hoc* and gerrymandered results. Kvanvig argues that such *ad hoc* and gerrymandered definitions are complicated and ugly and do not make knowledge look *distinctively* valuable. The more such definitions are made immune to Gettier-style counterexamples, the more complicated they become and the lesser capacity they appear to have to explain the distinctive value of knowledge. We end up in a dilemma. Kvanvig despairs of finding distinctive value to knowledge or solving the secondary value problem.

However, Kvanvig argues that understanding, or what he calls objectual understanding, is an epistemic state that has distinctive value. Objectual understanding for Kvanvig, as noted in Chap. 4, is holistic in nature and amounts to something like mastering a whole subject like physics or an art like shipbuilding. Such mastery involves “grasping” or “seeing” the interrelations between various component parts of the subject, among other things. Being able to do so is obviously a kind of epistemic achievement. In Kvanvig’s own words: “Understanding requires the grasping of explanatory and other coherence-making relationships in a large and comprehensive body of information. One can know many unrelated pieces of information, but understanding is achieved only when informational items are pieced together by the subject in question” (2003, 191).

Understanding is valuable not just because it requires grasping of explanatory and other coherence-making relationships. It is also valuable because these coherence relations contribute to subjective justification of our beliefs. However, Kvanvig does not think that the value of understanding lies in such merely subjective justification. There are a number of other aspects to such understanding that make it valuable. He says:

Such justification is not merely subjective, however, for the awareness in question must be correct in order for the factive element of understanding to obtain. Moreover, to have mastered such explanatory relationships is valuable not only because it involves the finding of new truths but also because finding such relationships organizes and systematizes our thinking on a subject matter in a way beyond the mere addition of more true beliefs or even justified true beliefs. Such organization is pragmatically useful because it allows us to reason from one bit of information to other related information that is useful as a basis for action, where unorganized thinking provides no such basis for inference. Moreover, such organized elements of thought provide intrinsically satisfying closure to the process of inquiry, yielding a sense or feeling of completeness to our grasp of a particular subject matter. In sum, understanding is valuable because it is constituted by subjectively justified true belief across an appropriately individuated body of information that is systematized and organized in the process of achieving understanding, and subjectively justified true belief that is systematized in this way is valuable. (202)

Such objectual understanding is quasi-factive in the sense that it can involve some error in some peripheral beliefs. The central beliefs of the organized body, though, will have to be true (Kvanvig 2009, 311). In addition, Kvanvig believes that such understanding is not threatened by Gettier cases. He gives the example of a situation where one’s understanding of an historical period is brought about by one’s dyslexia. One’s sources are misleading but one reads them incorrectly because

of dyslexia and thereby derives correct information from them. Kvanvig thinks that as long as one relates the events correctly and can explain them through information derived in this fashion, one has the *understanding* of the concerned historical period (Cf. 311).

As we saw in Chap. 5, Kvanvig's insights about the holistic nature of understanding coincide with the views held by Zagzebsky on the matter. Its holistic nature (in giving us insights into explanatory relations between different beliefs) makes it valuable as it makes it challenging to achieve. However, his claim that virtuously produced true beliefs cannot explain the distinctive value of knowledge because they fall prey to the Gettier problem is controversial, to say the least. If we allow that the virtue epistemologies of Sosa, Zagzebsky, Greco, and Pritchard, for example, do have a way around the Gettier problem, then it can be claimed that the Zagzebsky model for addressing the primary and secondary value problem does succeed in explaining why knowledge has extra as well as distinctive value.

6.7 Concluding Remarks

The above discussion of some basic contemporary epistemological positions on the issue of value of knowledge and understanding yields three important conclusions. First, as far as the primary value problem is concerned, Zagzebsky's motive-action model provides a solution by taking a holistic view of knowledge wherein "known belief" and the "virtuous character" of the epistemic agent form a connected whole that we call "knowledge." Just as the virtuous motive combined with a right action enhances the moral value of the right action, the virtuous character of an epistemic agent combined with true belief enhances the value of the known belief. The connection here is integral, like the connection between motive and action. Knowledge is more valuable than true belief because of this connection between the known belief and the intellectual virtue of the knower.

Second, the tertiary value problem that knowledge is *finally* valuable or valuable for its *own sake* is a *pseudo-problem* because, as contended by Pritchard, not all knowledge is significant achievement on the part of the knower through the exercise of her abilities. That makes the claim for the *final* value of knowledge questionable. On the other hand, the secondary value problem or the claim that knowledge is distinctively valuable or has more value than any of its proper constituent parts can be addressed by the motive-action model. The answer, as already noted, lies in taking knowledge to be the whole state of the known belief and the intellectual virtue of the knower. The connected whole is more valuable than its constituent parts (or the sum of their individual values) in the same way as right action combined with virtuous motive is more valuable than right action or motive taken individually or the sum of their individual values. The connection gives the whole its extra value. Therefore the so-called secondary value problem gets addressed in the same way as the primary value problem.

Given Zagzebsky's motive-action model, therefore, knowledge is not only more valuable than ignorance (taken as false belief) but is more valuable than true belief as well as the sum of the individual value of its constituent parts.

Our third conclusion relates to the epistemic state of understanding. It definitely involves a significant use of cognitive abilities and is always a significant achievement, particularly in its objectual/holistic form. As such it has *final* value for us as epistemic agents. The epistemic state of knowledge lacks such *final* value, particularly in cases where knowledge does not involve a significant use of cognitive abilities and is not a significant achievement on the part of the epistemic agent.

Our overall conclusion, therefore, is that knowledge has distinctive value though not *final* value and understanding is *finally* valuable. Insofar as the Qur'ān connects *taqwā*, our moral and epistemic conscience, with the epistemic states of knowledge and understanding, as seen in earlier chapters, this conclusion dovetails nicely with the Qur'ānic hints.

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Chapter 7

Concept of Wisdom in the Qur'ān



7.1 Introduction

In this chapter the Qur'ānic concept of *ḥik'mat* will be developed and compared with some recent discussions of wisdom as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle understood it and as some recent writers understand it. It will be argued that *ḥik'mat* in the Qur'ān stands connected with *taqwā* or our moral and epistemic conscience. Hence, Qur'ānic epistemology is an epistemology of living well (morally) at its deepest level.

7.2 Preliminary Remarks

Wisdom is a rare and rather fascinating virtue. In some sense all of us are in search of wisdom or wise people all our lives. Great personages of the millennia past are studied through their works and life stories in order to gain insight into their wisdom. History is carefully scrutinized to uncover the wisdom of past communities, cultures, and nations. Religious texts are explored thoroughly to cull their wisdom. This fascination with wisdom is generally motivated by a desire to illumine our hearts and souls by the wisdom of great personages and books, past and present. Despite this abiding fascination with wisdom as a virtue, however, very little consensus has emerged among writers and thinkers regarding its nature. Moreover, modern epistemology has not really focused on the nature of wisdom for a long time and only recently has this topic started attracting the attention of epistemologists.

The Qur'ānic term for wisdom is *ḥik'mat*. This noun appears in the Qur'ān twenty times (Qur'ānic Arabic Dictionary). Here we will examine the contexts in which this term has been used to get a sense of the salient features of its meaning

and use in the Qur'ān. On that basis we'll try to construct a view of wisdom in the Qur'ān in comparison with some contemporary epistemological writings on the subject.

7.3 *Hik'mat* in the Qur'ān

Perhaps the most important use of the term *ḥik'mat* in the Qur'ān is at 2:269, where wisdom is described as “much good” or “good abundant.”

He gives wisdom to whom He wills, and whoever has been given wisdom has certainly been given much good. And none will remember except those of understanding.

This equation between “good” and wisdom is an important one. I take it that the term “*khair*,” translated as “good,” stands for good in a comprehensive sense, applicable to all forms of good. This includes both moral and intellectual good. Taken this way, *wisdom is abundant moral and intellectual good*.

With this background in view, when we look at all the other verses of the Qur'ān from the point of view of how wisdom can be acquired, it turns out that wisdom is something that is “taught” to people. In a number of verses the Qur'ān describes the Prophet as teaching wisdom to his people:

Just as We have sent among you a messenger from yourselves reciting to you Our verses and purifying you and teaching you the Book and wisdom and teaching you that which you did not know. (2:151)

Verses 2:129, 3:48, 3:164, 5:110, and 62:2 similarly talk about wisdom being “taught.” *If wisdom is a matter of teaching then it is something that one can learn. One may have a greater or lesser propensity for learning wisdom, but wisdom is teachable, particularly by someone who is an exemplar.*

Now when the Qur'ān talks about teaching of wisdom in the above-mentioned verses, it talks about teaching of “Scripture and wisdom.” Hence, it is talking about imparting knowledge of the Scripture and wisdom to people. Verse 2:151 above explicitly connects this process with “teaching you that which you did not know” (also see 4:113). Teaching of Scripture and wisdom is teaching of knowledge that people did not know before. *From these contexts, therefore, wisdom is some kind of knowledge.* Hence, wisdom for the Qur'ān is an epistemic state as well.¹

Additionally, the Qur'ān explicitly links Scripture and wisdom with bringing people out of “manifest error.” It says:

Certainly did Allah confer [great] favor upon the believers when He sent among them a Messenger from themselves, reciting to them His verses and purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom, although they had been before in manifest error. (3:164) (Also see 62:2)

¹As noted by Jason Baehr (2014), Aristotle's discussion of *sophia* or wisdom seems to see it sometimes as a cognitive ability and sometimes as a cognitive or epistemic state.

I take “manifest error” here to point to a comprehensive error about the worldview which makes one live a morally and spiritually misguided life. Hence, the Qur'ān is talking about bringing people out of moral and spiritual error through the teaching of Scripture and wisdom. *Therefore, wisdom for the Qur'ān is also connected with moral rectitude or righteousness, among other things.*

Another very important connection that the Qur'ān hints at is the one between wisdom and best argument on a subject. The verse goes as follows:

Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided. (16:125)

Inviting people to the Lord's way with “wisdom and good instruction” is elaborated as the way of best argument. *Hence, this verse shows that wisdom is linked with the best argument that one can make on a certain subject.*

In addition the Qur'ān seems to connect wisdom with “purification” in several verses.

Our Lord, and send among them a messenger from themselves who will recite to them Your verses and teach them the Book and wisdom and purify them. Indeed, You are the Exalted in Might, the Wise. (2:129)

This is when Abraham and Ishmael prayed for their progeny during the construction of *Ka'ba* at Mecca. Being purified by the Scripture and wisdom should apparently mean moral and spiritual purification. *So wisdom is partly an agent for moral and spiritual purification and is related, as noted above, to moral righteousness.*

Wisdom is also related to *understanding, discernment of speech, and ability to clarify contentious issue* in verses 2:269, 38:20, and 43:63, respectively.

Overall therefore, for the Qur'ān wisdom is *abundant moral and intellectual good, and a knowledge that can be taught and learned, is involved with making the best argument on a subject, involves understanding, discernment of speech, and the ability to clarify contentious issues, and leads to moral and spiritual rectitude or overall righteousness.* The elements of this abundant moral and intellectual good are knowledge, understanding, and best possible arguments that should jointly lead to overall righteousness. For the Qur'ān wisdom is a form of knowledge as well as understanding that produce comprehensive righteousness in one's life. It is a virtue that the Qur'ān seems to take to be a product of knowledge and understanding that involve best argument or reasoning. Hence wisdom, being a virtue, does appear to be an ability to act righteously. Although it is an epistemic or cognitive state, it is a state that produces overall righteousness or virtue.

We know that Aristotle distinguishes two types of wisdom, *sophia* and *phronesis* or theoretical wisdom and practical wisdom. We do not see any such explicit distinction in the Qur'ān. Rather the Qur'ān seems to take wisdom as a form of knowledge and understanding and connects this knowledge and understanding with overall righteousness. Knowledge and understanding, as we have seen in earlier chapters, come through the use of cognitive faculties including reason as well as epistemic virtues. Hence, I infer that wisdom for the Qur'ān is basically a cognitive activity producing epistemic states that aim at achievement of comprehensive

righteousness or virtue. But we saw in Chap. 5 that comprehensive righteousness for the Qur'ān is *taqwā* or conscientiousness. Wisdom, therefore, seems to be state(s) of knowledge and understanding that reinforce our disposition of *taqwā*. (Since understanding is holistic for the Qur'ān, it can involve propositional knowledge.) A wise person has a much stronger *taqwā* (or sense of virtue or comprehensive reflective and motivational conscience) than someone who lacks wisdom or has a lesser degree. (Wisdom, primarily a matter of understanding, will involve degrees.) Wisdom is cognitive activity that specifically strengthens our disposition for righteousness or *taqwā*. It strengthens or sharpens our reflective conscience for doing the right thing in all practical and intellectual matters. It is a cognitive attainment that specifically aims at strengthening our conscience or disposition for righteousness in general.

7.4 Elaboration of the Qur'ānic Position Through Ancient and Contemporary Writers

The central question, however, is: what kind of knowledge and understanding can reinforce our *taqwā* or comprehensive reflective conscience? It should go without saying that this knowledge and understanding must be knowledge and understanding of matters that are significant and valuable for our lives. Sharon Ryan has recently proposed what she calls a Deep Rationality Theory of wisdom. According to her, wisdom is not a matter of having extensive factual knowledge or knowledge about how to live well, because what we take to be knowledge today may be abandoned tomorrow. Wisdom, she argues, is a matter of having a wide variety of justified beliefs on a variety of academic subjects as well as on issues relating to living rationally from an epistemic, practical or moral point of view (Ryan 2012, 99–112). It also involves a commitment to live rationally in the light of such justified beliefs.

The point made by Ryan about our inability to attain definitive knowledge is well taken. As she notes, a knowledge-based view of wisdom makes it much harder to pin down or attribute to any of the wise people from the past. What they took to be knowledge is, in most cases, no longer considered knowledge by us, yet we still consider them to be wise. Ryan proposes that rather than knowledge we make wisdom a matter of an extensive variety of justified beliefs and a commitment to live by them. However, I think a better way out is to relate wisdom with the epistemic state of understanding, which is different from propositional knowledge in its objectual and atomistic forms, and which, as we saw in Chap. 5, involves the grasp of deeper logical or interpretive relations of principles or phenomena or story. In fact, according to the Qur'ānic view discussed there, it is the epistemic state of understanding that is involved in grasping the ethical and the wiser course. Dependence relations between various parts of a discipline are grasped in this epistemic state and it is not a factive state. That is to say, not all of our beliefs about a subject matter must be true in order for us to have an understanding of it. Knowledge, on the other hand, is

a factive state and false belief cannot be knowledge. People with a deep understanding of life or certain areas of life can attain wisdom even when some of their beliefs are false or are eventually proved false. True justified beliefs involved in such overall understanding of an academic subject or an area of life or nature may attain to the level of knowledge that fits well with the state of understanding. Not all justified beliefs involved in such understanding, though, may attain the status of knowledge. That makes it possible for people to be wise even when not all their justified beliefs turn out to be true. Wisdom, therefore, is a state of understanding (objectual/holistic and atomistic) and the above analysis of relevant Qur'ānic verses seems to point in that direction. But it is not an ordinary state of understanding. It is a kind of deep comprehensive understanding of various areas of life and nature that turns upon itself to sharpen our *taqwā* or conscience, identifying the best course of action in all or most situations of life. In other words, it helps us live well or achieve comprehensive *falāḥ* or success through living conscientiously. It is in this sense that the Qur'ān takes understanding to be a state that helps us select the ethical and the wiser course of action, as noted in Chap. 5. Verse 2:269, quoted in that chapter, explicitly states that only people of understanding realize what an “abundant good” wisdom is.

Such a position turns out to be closer to Plato's view of wisdom as *episteme*, if we accept the view that *episteme* is better translated as understanding rather than knowledge.² Also, this position is similar to Aristotle's theoretical wisdom. Let us look at Plato first.

Jon Moline has argued in his *Plato's Theory of Understanding* that Plato's *episteme* cannot be equated with the modern concept of knowledge. Moline prefers to translate *episteme* as understanding. He takes *logos* or being able to give an account or explanation as necessary for having *episteme*. In addition such *episteme* or understanding has a motivational component for Plato. Hence, Moline argues, understanding for Plato leads to correct action necessarily while knowledge, as taken by us today, does not (1981, Chaps. 1 and 2).

William Prior further reinforces this line of thought:

If it is reasonable to expect that someone claiming knowledge should be able to provide some rational explanation of the fact known, it is even more reasonable to expect this of someone claiming *episteme*. The concept of *episteme* is explicitly linked with the concept of *logos*, rational account or explanation, in Greek philosophy. Fine³ mentions *Meno* 98a, *Phaedo* 76d, *Republic* VII, 531e and 534b as passages in which Plato links the possession of *episteme* to the ability to give a *logos* of what one knows; and, though the attempt to define *episteme* as true opinion with the addition of an account in the *Theaetetus* ends in apparent failure, the connection between *episteme* and *logos* seems reaffirmed in the rhetorical question at 202d: “how can there ever be knowledge without an account?” One may well think that the connection between *episteme* and *logos* was for Plato analytic. (Prior 1998, 107)

²See Zagzebsky (2012, 354–5) for a discussion of *episteme* in Plato.

³Prior's footnote 18: [“Gail Fine,” “Knowledge and Belief in *Republic* V–VII” in Stephan Everson ed., *Epistemology* (Cambridge 1990), 106]. For a detailed discussion of the relation between *episteme* and *logos*, with many additional references to passages in the Platonic corpus, see Moline (1981, chap 2, esp. 33–43).

There are, therefore, a number of scholars who think *episteme* is best translated as understanding which includes an account or explanation of the thing understood. As we saw in our chapter on Understanding, the Qur'ān takes a somewhat similar view. Therefore, the Qur'ānic view of wisdom as understanding appears to be quite close to Plato's concept of *episteme*.

What is the relationship between *sophia* or wisdom and *episteme* for Plato? In his *A History of Greek Philosophy: IV, Plato: The Man and His Dialogues Earlier Period*, W.K.C. Guthrie, while commenting on *Meno*, writes an additional note on knowledge and wisdom. He says:

At [*Meno*] 88b, S [Socrates] substitutes *phronesis* (usually translated as 'wisdom' or 'good sense') for *episteme* (knowledge), obviously with no change of meaning intended. Thompson *ad loc.* called *phronesis* 'the mental faculty correlative to it', but as *Euthyd.* and other Dialogues make clear, the relationship is almost one of identity. *Sophia* (wisdom) and *episteme* are similarly interchangeable. ... At *Euthyd.* 281b both *phronesis* and *sophia* are equated with *episteme* (cf. 282a and *Th.* 145 e), and at 288d S. defines philosophy as the acquisition of *episteme*. Both in Plato and elsewhere one must translate *Phronesis* and *sophia* as either 'knowledge' or 'wisdom' according to the context. (Guthrie 1975)

These analyses and references to the *Dialogues* show that *episteme* is equated with "wisdom" in Plato and, as Guthrie also notes in the same passage, in the Greek language of the time.

Aristotle's use of the word *episteme* is somewhat similar to that of Plato. As Prior notes in a continuation of the passage quoted above:

Nor is Plato's connection between *episteme* and *logos* idiosyncratic. When Aristotle defines *episteme* in *Posterior Analytics* 2, he says that we have *episteme* of a fact when we "know the cause on which the fact depends, as the cause of that fact and no other, and further, that the fact could not be other than it is (71b10 ff.)." (Prior 1998, 107)

He defines the faculty of *episteme* in *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.3 as "the capacity to demonstrate." Aristotle limits the scope of *episteme* to necessary truths, and demands for these not just a rational account but a demonstration that shows their necessity. These restrictions are so different from those we place on knowledge that translators are prone to mark them by translating *episteme* as "scientific knowledge" rather than simply as "knowledge" (Prior 1998, 107).

So *episteme* involves a "rational account" for Aristotle as well and, if we delink it from necessary truths, his view of it does not appear to be very different from that of Plato. Indeed *episteme* is taken as a part of *sophia* by Aristotle at *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1139b40-41.

Therefore, the Greek tradition seems to link wisdom with a kind of comprehensive and explanatory understanding or *episteme* that has similarities with the Qur'ānic view.

Among contemporary writers on epistemology, Jason Baehr also defines theoretical wisdom in terms of understanding. He proposes that "we think of *sophia* as deep explanatory understanding of epistemically significant subject matters"

(Baehr 2014, 310). This he calls an “explanatory understanding account of *sophia*” which is basically taking wisdom to be an epistemic state. Baehr distinguishes this account from two other accounts, “cognitive faculty” and “intellectual trait,” that he develops. According to Baehr’s cognitive faculty account, *sophia* is a kind of ability through which one attains the virtue or good that we call “wisdom.” Baehr proposes that we attain wisdom through the faculty of “*theoretical reason* – or, perhaps more accurately, the various ‘modes’ or subfaculties of theoretical reason like intuitive, deductive, inductive or explanatory reason” (313).

According to Baehr’s third account of *sophia*, it is “a kind of meta- or master-intellectual virtue – involving an understanding of how best to *pursue* deep explanatory understanding or how best to negotiate the terrain and demands of *inquiry* aimed at such understanding” (315). Baehr’s point is that *sophia* is an intellectual trait that helps us decide which of our first-order intellectual virtues such as open-mindedness or intellectual courage must come into play in meeting the demands of a certain field of inquiry in order for us to successfully attain “deep explanatory understanding.”

From among the three accounts of wisdom developed by Baehr, the epistemic state account appears to be closest to the one implied by the Qur’ānic use of the term *ḥik’mat*. We argued above that for the Qur’ān, wisdom is self-reflective deep comprehensive understanding of various areas of life and nature which sharpens our *taqwā* or conscience to help us live a life of *falāḥ* or success. This deep comprehensive understanding involves a grasp of the deeper logical or interpretive implications of principles or phenomena or story as well as a grasp of the right ethical course of action and mastery of language. At least these are some of the things explicitly mentioned about understanding. Wisdom is attained by us when such comprehensive understanding of a subject matter turns upon itself to streamline itself for the conscientious and best possible action related to that subject matter. Wisdom, therefore, is a product of comprehensive understanding turning to reflect upon itself to find the best course of action. We can call this mode of understanding “reflective understanding.” It is a kind of meta-understanding. It streamlines our comprehensive understanding of an area of life for selecting the best course of action in all related matters. It sharpens our *taqwā* or conscience. Once such reflective understanding is attained by an epistemic agent in one area of life, she cannot lose it easily and tends to extend it to other areas as well.

As we argued above, understanding may not be completely factive and may involve some beliefs that later prove false. However, it is comprehensive and involves a grasp of logical, interpretive, and ethical implications of principles, phenomena, and stories as well as language. When such comprehensive understanding turns upon itself for selecting the best course of action, it can get linked with and focused upon sharpening our *taqwā* or conscience, and becomes the cognitive state of wisdom as well as ability for wise action. In a nutshell, wisdom reinforces and sharpens our capacity for conscientious living.

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Chapter 8

Concluding Thoughts



From the foregoing chapters it appears that virtuous cognitive activity is a progressive sequence for the Qur'ān. The central idea is to make a conscientious effort to avoid ignorance and attain knowledge. However, knowledge by itself is not the only epistemic goal and a holistic understanding of various areas of life is the next target. At the third and final stage the goal is the attainment of wisdom. Here knowledge and understanding have to be employed to reinforce and sharpen the intellectual and moral conscience or *taqwā*. This cognitive activity, wherein knowledge and more particularly understanding works to enhance our ability for living a life of *falāḥ* or comprehensive success, is the ultimate epistemic and moral goal. At the heart of this progressive epistemic sequence lies the Qur'ānic concept of *taqwā*, which is moral and intellectual conscientiousness based in a natural ability of the human *nafs* or self to distinguish right from wrong. This comprehensive reflective and motivational conscience is primarily an acquired stable disposition based in an initial natural ability to distinguish right from wrong. It expresses itself through specific intellectual virtues required for the attainment of the goal of knowledge or understanding or, ultimately, wisdom. In an ideal situation attainment of knowledge in various fields must lead to acquisition of understanding and, in turn, understanding should streamline its insights to sharpen the ability of the reflective and motivational conscience to make appropriate moral and intellectual decisions for living well or wisely. This latter part is a way for the understanding, attained through conscientiousness, to turn upon itself to streamline its own insights for strengthening and sharpening the very conscientiousness which had produced it in the first place. Wisdom, therefore, is a cognitive activity through which our comprehensive conscience strengthens itself by utilizing its own achievements of knowledge and understanding. It is what might be called *reflective* or meta-understanding, which leads to strengthening of our epistemic and moral dispositions for the right beliefs and actions.

The idea of reflective understanding as wisdom needs to be elaborated. The overall picture of ideal or virtuous cognitive life painted in the previous chapters seems

to underscore that humans are responsible for a conscientious use of their natural faculties as well as acquired intellectual dispositions or virtues. As they attain knowledge they do so both passively and actively. The passive knowledge is pre-reflective while active knowledge is reflective. Understanding, holistic particularly, results from a significant effort on the part of the epistemic agent and is primarily reflective. Wisdom can result from reflection on reflective knowledge as well as (reflective) understanding for the purpose of sharpening our intellectual and moral conscience. It is a reflection on how best to use our knowledge and understanding for living well, i.e., a life of comprehensive success or *falāḥ*. A sharpened intellectual and moral conscience produces wholesome epistemic and moral output. The resulting wisdom is both theoretical (*sophia*) and practical (*phronesis*).

We can get a sense of this reflective understanding through the simple example of mastering a language. It is, according to the Qur'ān, a matter of understanding. Obviously it involves grasp of a whole range of grammatical, semantic, and pragmatic relations. Such a holistic understanding can be achieved thorough exercising intellectual conscientiousness in a rigorous manner. Many intellectual virtues, such as intellectual honesty, openness to corrective criticism by the teachers, intellectual industriousness, and intellectual thoroughness come into play as one masters a language. Certain elements of propositional knowledge as well as knowledge *how* will also be a part of such a comprehensive understanding of a language as a general mastery of it. Once a person has such understanding of a language, she can at the next stage reflect on how best to use the language in ordinary life or for scholarly purposes. She can decide about doing what the Qur'ān refers to in verse 39:18 as listening to speech and following its best meaning. The best meaning means the meaning that is best from the perspective of living well. Obviously this will always keep the language user on the alert as an epistemic agent and will force her to always make conscientious decisions about her use of language. In a nutshell, it will sharpen her conscience, so to speak. I believe that this way of using one's understanding of language is putting it to a "wise" use and that is how reflective understanding on one's understanding of a field for the purposes of figuring out how to live well can produce wisdom.

Similar consideration would apparently apply in other areas in which one gains holistic understanding. We can repeat the above analysis in relation to mastery of a science as well. Someone who masters a certain area of the science of physics, for example, can similarly reflect on her understanding of the subject and try to find the best way to use her knowledge and understanding of physics. It may not be an easy task to decide what is the best way to use that branch of physics. However, if one does find the best way to use physics, let us say, for the service of humanity, then one would be putting his understanding of physics to a "wise" use. The resulting life of such a person will have certain wisdom to it insofar as it will be a life of sharply conscientious use of scientific understanding.

It might be objected that when we talk about wise historic figures such as Socrates and Confucius, we take them to be wise in a comprehensive way rather than in a particular sphere of expertise. This is definitely an important aspect of our ordinary conception of wisdom. A wise person is not just a wise physicist or

language user; she is wise in a general sense. It needs to be noted, however, that putting our understanding of physics to the best use possible after proper reflection on our understanding of physics is going to result in a sharpened conscience. This sharpened conscience is not put to sleep easily. It extends itself to other areas of life as we make decisions or judgments. It also becomes second nature through continuous practice and habituation. But the important thing is to realize that once a person develops, through reflective understanding, how to act wisely in regard to a certain sphere of life, she can then be motivated by her conscience to extend such reflective understanding to other spheres as well. With consistent effort, she can achieve more comprehensive wisdom for living well. It is a challenging ideal but it is an ideal worth pursuing.

A cognitive life of intellectual conscientiousness is ultimately tied to a life of moral conscientiousness in the hints given by the Qur'ān about ignorance, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. It is this connectedness between epistemic and moral lives that leads to comprehensive human *falāḥ* or success at all levels. Understanding, however, involves degrees and, as a result, there can be varying levels of *falāḥ* for people depending on how much one understands and how much of it one connects with morally conscientious or wise living.

Appendix: Some Basic Knowledge Related Concepts in the Qur'ān

Salient epistemic concepts of the Qur'ān include the concepts of ignorance, knowledge, various senses, memory, reason, thinking or reflection, revelation, testimony, inferential knowledge, warrant, practical utility of knowledge, analogical knowledge, belief, understanding, and wisdom.

The trilateral roots and Arabic terms for some of these concepts are given in the following table:

Concept	Trilateral Root	Term
Ignorance	<i>jīm hā lām</i> (ج ه ل)	<i>Jāhiliyyat</i> (جاهلية)
Knowledge	<i>'ayn lām mīm</i> (ع ل م)	<i>'il'm</i> (علم)
Sense perception: All five senses are mentioned as the source of knowledge/ experience in different contexts.		
Memory	<i>dhāl kāf rā</i> (ذ ك ر)	<i>dhākirā</i> (ذاكرة)
Reason	<i>'ayn qāf lām</i> (ع ق ل)	<i>'aql</i> (عقل)
Thinking	<i>fā kāf rā</i> (ف ك ر)	<i>Tafkir</i> (تفكير)
Reflection	<i>dāl bā rā</i> (د ب ر)	<i>tadabbar</i> (تدبر)
Revelation	<i>wāw hā yā</i> (و ح ي)	<i>wah</i> (وحي)
Testimony	<i>shīn hā dāl</i> (ش ه د)	<i>shahādat</i> (شهادة)
To derive or infer (Inferential Knowledge)	<i>nūn bā ṭā</i> (ن ب ط)	<i>yastanbiṭu</i> (يستنبط)
Warrant	<i>sīn lām ṭā</i> (س ل ط)	<i>sul'ṭān</i> (سلطان)
Practical Utility of Knowledge		
Analogical Knowledge	<i>mīm thā lām</i> (م ث ل)	<i>mith'l</i> (مثل)
Belief	<i>zā nūn nūn</i> (ظ ن ن)	<i>ẓann</i> (ظن)
Understanding	<i>lām bā bā</i> (ل ب ب)	<i>lūbb</i> (لب)
Wisdom	<i>hā kāf mīm</i> (ح ك م)	<i>ḥik'mat</i> (حكمة)

Below we list some of the verses where these concepts are mentioned. The verses mentioned in relation to a concept are not meant to be an exhaustive list.

Ignorance

The concept of ignorance in the Qur'ān is quite complex and in Chap. 2 we give an elaborate discussion of this concept. Here we only list some of the verses where this concept has been used in various ways. One basic element in the Qur'ānic concept of ignorance seems to be dogmatism. This comes out clearly from verses 3:154, 5:47–50, and 7:138

Dogmatism as Ignorance

Then, after grief, He sent down security for you. As slumber did it overcome a party of you, while (the other) party, who were anxious on their own account, thought wrongly of Allah, the thought of ignorance. They said: Have we any part in the cause? Say (O Muhammad): The cause belongeth wholly to Allah. They hide within themselves (a thought) which they reveal not unto thee, saying: Had we had any part in the cause we should not have been slain here. Say: Even though ye had been in your houses, those appointed to be slain would have gone forth to the places where they were to lie. (All this hath been) in order that Allah might try what is in your breasts and prove what is in your hearts. Allah is Aware of what is hidden in the breasts (of men). (3:154)

Also see 5:47–50

And though We should send down the angels unto them, and the dead should speak unto them, and We should gather against them all things in array, they would not believe unless Allah so willed. Howbeit, most of them are ignorant. (6:111)

And We brought the Children of Israel across the sea, and they came unto a people who were given up to idols which they had. They said: O Moses! Make for us a god even as they have gods. He said: Lo! ye are a folk who know not. (7:138)

And if ye (Muslims) call them to the guidance they hear not; and thou (Muhammad) seest them looking toward thee, but they see not.

Keep to forgiveness (O Muhammad), and enjoin kindness, and turn away from the ignorant. (7:198–9)

And O my people! I ask of you no wealth therefor. My reward is the concern only of Allah, and I am not going to thrust away those who believe —Lo! they have to meet their Lord!— but I see you a folk that are ignorant. (11:29)

And Noah cried unto his Lord and said: My Lord! Lo! my son is of my household! Surely Thy promise is the truth and Thou art the Most Just of Judges.

He said: O Noah! Lo! he is not of thy household; lo! he is of evil conduct, so ask not of Me that whereof thou hast no knowledge. I admonish thee lest thou be among the ignorant. (11:45–6)

Lo! We offered the trust unto the heavens and the earth and the hills, but they shrank from bearing it and were afraid of it. And man assumed it. Lo! he hath proved a tyrant and a fool. (33:72)

He said: The knowledge is with Allah only. I ('Ad) convey unto you that wherewith I have been sent, but I see you are a folk that know not. (46:23)

When those who disbelieve had set up in their hearts zealotry, the zealotry of the Age of Ignorance, then Allah sent down His peace of reassurance upon His messenger and upon the

believers and imposed on them the word of self-restraint, for they were worthy of it and meet for it. And Allah is Aware of all things. (48:26)

O ye who believe! If an evil-liver bring you tidings, verify it, lest ye smite some folk in ignorance and afterward repent of what ye did. (49:6)

Moral Insensitivity/Blindness as Ignorance

And when Moses said unto his people: Lo! Allah commandeth you that ye sacrifice a cow, they said: Dost thou make game of us? He answered: Allah forbid that I should be among the foolish! (ignorant) (2:67)

Also see 4:17, 6:54, 16:119, 6:35, 12:33, 12:89, 25:63, 28:55, 33:33

Unnatural Acts as Ignorance

See 27:55

Social Insensitivity as Ignorance

See 2:273 and 12:89

Ignorance in Religion

See 39:64:65

Experience/Sense Perception

By experiencing punishment, Pharaoh said, you'll come to *know* (the reality). (7:123)

And Allah brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers knowing nothing, and gave you hearing and sight and hearts that haply ye might give thanks. (Senses as source of knowledge) (16:78)

(O man), follow not that whereof thou hast no knowledge. Lo! the hearing and the sight and the heart— of each of these it will be asked. (17:36)

They will know (by experience) who is worse in position and who is weaker as an army. (19:75)

(Pharaoh said): ye shall know for certain [after experiencing my punishments] which of us hath sterner and more lasting punishment. (20:71)

They will know, when they behold the doom, who is more astray as to the road. (25:42)

(Pharaoh) said: Ye put your faith in him before I give you leave. Lo! he doubtless is your chief who taught you magic! But verily ye shall come to know. Verily I will cut off your hands and your feet alternately, and verily I will crucify you every one. (26:49)

And Pharaoh said: O chiefs! I know not that ye have a god other than me, so kindle for me (a fire), O Haman, to bake the mud; and set up for me a lofty tower in order that I may survey the god of Moses; and lo! I deem him of the liars. (28:38)

And if We would, We could show them unto thee (Muhammad) so that thou shouldst know them surely by their marks. And thou shalt know them by the burden of their talk. And Allah knoweth your deeds. (47:30)

(Unto their warner it was said): To-morrow they (Thamud) will know who is the rash liar. (54:26)

And verily ye know the first creation. Why, then, do ye not reflect? (by experience) (56:62)

Nay, verily. Lo! We created them from what they know. (70:39)

Till (the day) when they shall behold that which they are promised (they may doubt); but then they will know (for certain) who is weaker in allies and less in multitude. (72:24)

Who (guardians) know (all) that ye do. (82:12)

Reason

Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way. Lo! thy Lord is Best Aware of him who strayeth from His way, and He is Best Aware of those who go aright. (Use of reason to help reach correct belief) (16:125)

And We appoint the night and the day two portents. Then We make dark the portent of the night, and We make the portent of the day sight-giving, that ye may seek bounty from your Lord, and that ye may know the computation of the years, and the reckoning; and everything have We expounded with a clear expounding. (Reasoning from observation of day and night of computation of years; also “clarity” is noted as an epistemic value) (17:12)

Revelation

Revelation is like sight—the prophet does not have knowledge of the Unseen; he only follows revelation; and blind man and the one with sight cannot be equal. (6:50)

They (mankind) may know (through this revelation) that He is only One Allah (14:52)

People of Scripture *know* this revelation to be true (2:144)

People of earlier Scriptures know this revelation to be from God (6:114)

Is it not a token for them that the doctors of the Children of Israel know it? (26:197)

Till, when they come (before their Lord), He will say: Did ye deny My Revelations when ye could not compass them in knowledge, or what was it that ye did? (27:84)

Those who are firm (well grounded) in knowledge believe in this and earlier revelations (4:162)

God has detailed his signs (revelations) for a people who have knowledge. (6:97)

God makes His revelations clear for people who have knowledge by displaying them through various symbols. (6:105)

Who has forbidden things of beauty brought forth by God? Thus do we detail Our revelations for people who have knowledge. (7:32)

We detail Our revelations for a people who have knowledge. (9:11)

He (God) detaileth the revelations for people who have knowledge. (10:5)

And when We put a revelation in place of (another) revelation,—and Allah knoweth best what He revealeth—they say: Lo! thou art but inventing. Most of them know not. (16:101)

In His knowledge God has revealed this (revelation) to you and He testifies to it (4:166)

God taught Jesus the Scripture and the Wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel (5:110)

God taught the Jews (through revelation to Moses) that which they and their ancestors knew not. (6:91)

God expounded the Scripture with knowledge, a guidance and a mercy for a people who believe. (7:52)

Prophet Noah knew from God what people knew not. (7:62)

It (Qur'ān) is revealed only in the knowledge of Allah. (11:14)

Testimony

And when he came to Joseph in the prison, he exclaimed: Joseph! O thou truthful one! Expound for us the seven fat kine which seven lean were eating and the seven green ears of corn and other (seven) dry, that I may return unto the people, so that they may know. (Knowledge through testimony) (12:46)

And We sent not (as Our messengers) before thee other than men whom We inspired - Ask the followers of the Remembrance if ye know not!—(testimony) (16:43)

And We sent not (as Our messengers) before thee other than men, whom We inspired. Ask the followers of the Reminder if ye know not? (testimony) (21:7)

Inferential Knowledge

Those among them who are able to think out the matter, i.e., infer, would have Known—(Inferential knowledge) (4:83)

Warrant

Abraham tells his people they have no warrant (sultan) for their idolatrous position while I do have it from God. Which of the two factions has more right to safety? Answer me if ye have knowledge. (6:81)

People forbade eating of some animals without knowledge; they should establish it with knowledge if they are right. (6:143)

They say: Allah hath taken (unto Him) a son—Glorified be He! He hath no needs! His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. Ye have no warrant for this. Tell ye concerning Allah that which ye know not? (10:68)

And they worship instead of Allah that for which He hath sent down no warrant, and that whereof they have no knowledge. (22:71)

Say: Unto Whom (belongeth) the earth and whosoever is therein, if ye have knowledge? (23:84)

Say: In Whose hand is the dominion over all things and He protecteth, while against Him there is no protection, if ye have knowledge? (23:88)

Keep your duty toward Him Who hath aided you with (the good things) that ye know. (26:132)

Say (unto them, O Muhammad): Have ye thought on all that ye invoke beside Allah? Show me what they have created of the earth. Or have they any portion in the heavens? Bring me a scripture before this (Scripture), or some vestige of knowledge (in support of what ye say), if ye are truthful. (46:4)

Practical Utility of Knowledge

One with whom was knowledge of the Scripture said: I will bring it thee before thy gaze returneth unto thee. (Practical utility of knowledge) (27:40)

He (Korah) said: I have been given it only on account of knowledge I possess. Knew he not that Allah had destroyed already of the generations before him men who were mightier than him in strength and greater in respect of following? (28:7)

Now when hurt toucheth a man he crieth unto Us, and afterward when We Have granted him a boon from Us, he saith: Only by force of knowledge I obtained it. Nay, but it is a test. But most of them know not. (39:49)

And when their messengers brought them clear proofs (of Allah's Sovereignty) they exulted in the knowledge they (themselves) possessed. And that which they were wont to mock befell them. (40:83)

Value of Knowledge

Are those who know equal with those who know not? But only men of understanding will pay heed. (Value of knowledge) (39:9)

Allah will exalt those who believe among you, and those who have knowledge, to high ranks. Allah is Informed of what ye do. (58:11)

Knowledge by Analogy

The likeness of those who choose other patrons than Allah is as the likeness of the spider when she taketh unto herself a house, and lo! the frailest of all houses is the spider's house, if they but knew. (Knowledge through analogy) (29:41)

Distinction Between Knowledge and *ẓann* or Belief

And they have no knowledge thereof (nature of angels). They follow but a guess, and lo! A guess can never take the place of the truth. (53:28)

Understanding

There are 16 places where the Qur'ān has used the noun *al-baab* from triliteral root *l-b-b*. This noun means “understanding.” Here are a few examples of this Qur'ānic use:

Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding. (3:190)

Say, “Not equal are the evil and the good, although the abundance of evil might impress you.” So fear Allah, O you of understanding, that you may be successful. (5:100)

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